

The book draws on a vast factual material to describe the history of emergence and development of the idea of freedom of conscience and of the liberation of the working people from the spiritual slavery. This history is at the same time the history of atheism in the USSR. The book focuses on such legal acts as the separation of church from state and of school from church, on the evolution of the Orthodox Church and of other religions, and on the illustration of the clergy's allegiance to the Soviet system at present.

The book is intended for a wide readership interested in the problem of freedom of conscience.

A. Barmenkov

FREEDOM  
OF  
CONSCIENCE  
IN THE  
USSR



PROGRESS PUBLISHERS

MOSCOW

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**СВОБОДА СОВЕСТИ В СССР**

*На английском языке*

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English translation of the revised Russian text

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## INTRODUCTION

In this book, the author seeks to convey to the foreign reader the truth about how freedom of conscience is respected in the Soviet Union, to describe the position and evolution of various religions in this country and the attitude of the Soviet state to those who believe in God.

This book is topical today when the forces hostile to the Soviet Union, along with anti-Soviet and anti-communist centres, and the bourgeois press and other media are spreading falsehoods about alleged violations of freedom of conscience in the USSR, seeking to prove that believers and priests are persecuted in the Soviet Union for their faith.

The enemies of the Soviet Union need these charges in order to place communist ideals in a bad light, to poison the minds of the working people with bourgeois morals and to weaken the attraction of existing socialism. The slanderous campaign launched in many capitalist countries, particularly in the USA, against the socialist community under the false slogan of human rights has demonstrated once again that the idea of freedom of conscience is used by the bourgeoisie as propaganda instrument in order to perpetuate its rule and make the bourgeois way of life more attractive.

Because their ideological arsenal lacks social doctrines capable of resisting the magnetic ideas of communism, bourgeois ideologists resort to falsifying Soviet reality and the profoundly humane and democratic principles of the policies pursued by the Communist Party and the government of the Soviet Union, including their attitudes toward religion and the church.

Yet it is the capitalist countries that shamelessly trample on basic human rights. The capitalist system nowadays brings the working man countless sufferings and hardships—mass unemployment, inflation, skyrocketing prices, lack of housing and health care. It is there that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. What rights has an unemployed if he is unable to make a living, provide for his family, or if he is turned out of his apartment because he cannot pay the rent? Freedom of conscience indeed, when it is impossible even to live like a human being!

The exploitative classes alone enjoy freedom under capitalism. "Democracy for an insignificant minority, democracy for the rich—that is the democracy of capitalist society,"<sup>1</sup> said Lenin.

Freedom of conscience, like many other formal freedoms, is used to deceive the working people in bourgeois society. The leaders of the bourgeois revolution, Lenin pointed out, "a hundred and fifty and two hundred and fifty years ago . . . promised to rid mankind of medieval privileges, of sex inequality, of state privileges for one religion or another (or 'religious *ideas*', 'the church' in general). . . They promised, but did not keep their promises."<sup>2</sup>

There can be no freedom for working people in a society divided into antagonistic classes. Only the countries where the exploitative classes have been abolished are able to ensure real democratic rights and freedoms. The article on the freedom of conscience is an important part of the system of political rights and freedoms embodied in the Constitution of the USSR. It regards freedom of conscience as an inherent right of every Soviet citizen and a manifestation of personal freedom.

Freedom of conscience is one of the most important principles of the Leninist policy of the Communist Party and the Soviet state toward religion and the church. The Soviet state is carrying out these principles firmly and consistently.

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The State and Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 465.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution," *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, pp. 53-54.

The USSR is the first country to realise in practice the broadest possible freedom of conscience. The Soviet Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience thus ensuring total freedom to believe in any God and to conduct religious worship, as well as total freedom not to believe in God and to conduct propaganda against any religion. The Communist Party rejects in principle any coercion in matters of belief or unbelief and the laws of the socialist state safeguard the citizens' freedom of conscience.

By consistently implementing the Leninist policy-making principles on religion, the Communist Party has made tremendous progress in liberating Soviet people from religious ideology and has involved the working masses into active construction of a new society. A highly developed economy has emerged in the Soviet Union, the people's intellectual culture has grown and a high standard of life has been attained over the years of Soviet power. This is why an overwhelming majority of Soviet population has broken with religious prejudices.

Some of the Soviet people, however, still remain under the influence of religious ideology. The Soviet state and society are guided by humane considerations in their attitudes toward such people. They try to liberate them gradually from the bonds of religion and make them active builders of the new world without offending their religious sensibilities, through long, painstaking work to raise their cultural level and to explain the negative aspects of religious prejudices, which are incompatible with a scientific view of the world. The Communist Party and Soviet state are guided by the theses of Marxism that religious consciousness, by its very nature, is an anti-scientific, illusory reflection of reality and is synonymous to ignorance and suppression of man's spiritual forces. To liberate a believer from his religious delusion is to make him class-conscious, active and energetic, to emancipate his spiritual forces in order to create a life worthy of man on earth rather than in heaven.

## CHAPTER 1

# THE SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNIST PARTY POLICY TOWARD RELIGION AND THE CHURCH

### *Marx and Engels on Religion*

Religion is an historical phenomenon. Mankind did not know religion in the earliest stage of its history. There will be no religion in the future, although ideologists of the exploitative classes try in vain to prove that it is eternal. Nevertheless, while the emergence of religion was spontaneous, its disappearance involves deliberate actions aimed at destroying the old society and creating a new one.

The rise of atheism, the conviction that religion is doomed historically was a gradual process. As science and culture developed religious concepts of the origin of the world, of nature and human society were increasingly subjected to criticism which cast doubts on their credibility and relevance. Specifically, religion was sharply criticised by French philosophers of the Enlightenment, such as Voltaire, Diderot, Helvetius, Holbach, La Mettrie, and the German philosopher Feuerbach. Treating religion as the enemy of free thought, reason and enlightenment, and basing themselves on achievements of natural science, those philosophers demonstrated the groundlessness of religious conceptions of the immortal soul and existence of God, denounced the hypocrisy of the clergy and substantiated the need for freedom of conscience in any civilised country.

Having absorbed the atheistic traditions of the 18th-century materialists, Marx and Engels went further in their critique of religion and applied materialist dialectics to history and public life. Drawing upon the many centuries of struggle against religious superstitions and revising views and conclusions drawn by think-

ers of the past, Marx and Engels provided a scientific explanation of the origin and essence of religion and showed how to overcome it. "Religion," Engels wrote, "arose in very primitive times from erroneous, primitive conceptions of men about their own nature and external nature surrounding them."<sup>1</sup>

Marx and Engels showed that it is not nature but men's specific attitudes to it that produce religion. A low level of the productive forces did not permit men to master the forces of nature. Their impotence in the struggle against stronger natural and social phenomena made them fall back on cult actions, on illusory methods of influencing their world. The reflection of real phenomena of nature and society in religious beliefs is regarded by Marxism, in addition to being caused by human ignorance, as a result of certain social conditions. "All religion," Engels wrote, "is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces."<sup>2</sup>

Primitive man was powerless against the formidable forces of nature. He was especially afraid of the difficulties in obtaining food when so much depended on chance, on nature's "whims". He gradually formed a notion of his total dependence on forces above him with supernatural properties. A reflection of social relations was added to the fantastic reflection of natural forces later on, as class antagonisms emerged.

The founders of scientific communism revealed and explained the essence of religion in social terms, showed how to overcome it. "*Man makes religion,*" Marx wrote, "religion does not make man. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again. . . . Man is *the world of man*, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, an *inverted world-consciousness*, because they are an *inverted world*. . . . The struggle against re-

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy", in: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 3, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 372.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978, p. 382.

ligion is therefore indirectly a fight against *the world* of which religion is the spiritual *aroma*.<sup>1</sup>

Marx and Engels proved that the emergence of religion was based on material causes—society's economic system at certain stages in its development. First of all, Marxism singles out the social roots of religion. Historical materialism is known to proceed from the primacy of social being over social consciousness. Religion was brought about by a certain level of social relations and economic conditions which showed that man had been totally dependent on nature. He was poorly armed against the elements and could neither understand nor explain natural phenomena because of his low intelligence, therefore he was frightened. This incomprehension of natural processes and phenomena caused our distant ancestor to deify them. Further development of the productive forces helped expand the areas where man could influence nature and create what seemed like favourable conditions for weakening his dependence on natural forces. But the same growth of the productive forces changed the relations of production. Antagonistic classes and the machinery of coercion emerged. These conditions made it possible for man to exploit man. The ruling classes adopted religious ideology as a tool to maintain and strengthen social inequality.

Marx and Engels tied in the struggle against religion and the proletariat's class struggle. Stressing religion's transient character, they demonstrated that it was impossible to overcome religion without revolutionary transformation of the social system based on man's exploitation and oppression. "The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production," Marx wrote, "does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan."<sup>2</sup> They therefore linked emancipation from religious prejudices to involvement of the working masses in political activities for the revolutionary reconstruction of society. The experience of the USSR and other

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law", in: Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, p. 84.

socialist countries shows that it is only during class struggle and socialist and communist construction that the materialist world-outlook is formed and religious prejudices are shed away.

In addition to the historical and social roots of religion, Marxism-Leninism scientifically traced its epistemological roots. The powerlessness of a savage facing the forces of nature was not the only cause of religion. A certain level of consciousness was needed for man to become aware of this. His intellect had to be mature enough to be able to separate images and perceptions from real, existing phenomena. Lenin thus explained the process: "The approach of the (human) mind to a particular thing, the taking of a copy (=a concept) of it *is not* a simple, immediate act, a dead mirroring, but one which is complex, split into two, zig-zag-like, which *includes in it* the possibility of the flight of fantasy from life; more than that: the possibility of the *transformation* (moreover, an unnoticeable transformation, of which man is unaware) of the abstract concept, idea, into a *fantasy* (in letzter Instanz=God). For even in the simplest generalisation, in the most elementary general idea ('table' in general), *there is* a certain bit of *fantasy*."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin viewed the epistemological roots of religion in close connection with the social roots. The fantastic distortion of reality is possible only under certain social conditions.

The scientific explanation of the origin of religion and the analysis of its social and epistemological roots made it possible for the classics of Marxism to be the first in the history of atheism to disclose the essence of religious ideology and church organisation.

The essence of religion was profoundly exposed by Marx. He wrote: "*Religious* distress is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and also the *protest* against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people."<sup>2</sup> Lenin valued highly Marx's conclusion and called

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Conspectus of Aristotle's Book *Metaphysics*", *Collected Works*, Vol. 38, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972, p. 372.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law", in: Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 175.

it "the corner stone of the entire world-view of Marxism in the matter of religion." He described religion, in his turn, as "...a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man."<sup>1</sup>

Marxism-Leninism was the first to give a fundamentally new, true, and scientifically sound point of view on religion as a form of social consciousness reflecting the conditions of human material life like any other form of social consciousness. But, in contrast to the other forms of social consciousness, natural phenomena and social relations are reflected in fantastic shapes by the religious consciousness.

Religion acts as an instrument for the spiritual oppression of the working people in class society. Lenin wrote: "All oppressing classes stand in need of two social functions to safeguard their rule: the function of the hangman and the function of the priest. The hangman is required to quell the protests and the indignation of the oppressed; the priest is required to console the oppressed, to depict to them the prospects of their sufferings and sacrifices being mitigated (this is particularly easy to do without guaranteeing that these prospects will be "achieved"), while preserving class rule, and thereby to reconcile them to class rule, win them away from revolutionary action, undermine their revolutionary spirit and destroy their revolutionary determination."<sup>2</sup>

In class-divided, antagonistic societies, the real causes of human suffering are economic, political, military, and national oppression which hurts body and mind. These social forces, which dominate people in their everyday lives, take the shape of supernatural forces.

Ideologists of the church deny that religion's main function is to justify and defend social inequality. They try to persuade the toiling masses that suffering is mankind's eternal fate, that social inequality and injustice have been established by God and

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Socialism and Religion", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978, pp. 83-84.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Collapse of the Second International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, pp. 231-32.



are the result of man's Fall. As Pope Pius XII once said, the rich and the poor have always existed and the unalterability of man's being gives reason to suppose that it would remain like that forever. Other leaders of the Vatican spoke in the same vein.

The acceptance and defence of the exploitation of man by man reflect the social essence of religion. Inasmuch as social inequality has been established by God, it says, it would be senseless to resist social injustice. To seek to alter the social order is to apostatise. To please the ruling classes, ministers of all religions teach believers that the majority of the people cannot expect terrestrial happiness, but can only hope for paradise beyond the grave. The church has always done everything in its power to divert the working people from class struggle.

#### *Developing a Principled Party Attitude to Religion*

Marx and Engels attached great importance to formulating the fundamental questions underlying a proletarian party's attitudes to religion, church, and religious believers. In his early works, such as "On the Jewish Question" (1843), "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction" (1843-1844) and "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", Marx termed religion as an anti-scientific and reactionary ideology. He proved the incompatibility between religion and political freedom and explained the need for separation of church and state as a precondition for democratisation of existing social relations.

Religion, its doom and the inevitability of its dying out, was the subject of an early work by Engels "The Condition of England". He attacked distortions of the general democratic principle of freedom of conscience found even in the most liberal countries of that time, such as the USA and Great Britain, where religious prejudices predominated and atheists were not protected by law.

The classics of Marxism warned against any simplified and narrow interpretation of the religious question. Engels criticised Dühring when the latter suggested that all religion should be prohibited in his "state of the future". In 1874, Engels ridiculed

the followers of Louis Blanqui who tried to force the Paris Communards to ban religious preaching and any religious organisation.<sup>1</sup>

In the age of imperialism and proletarian revolutions, Lenin exposed the social, historical and epistemological roots of religion and substantiated the Communist Party's basic policy towards religion and the church. He criticised the opportunistic distortions in the views of the founders of scientific communism on religion. He fought sophisticated religious-philosophical teachings, such as God-building and God-seeking, and the attempts to renew religion. In his works "Socialism and Religion", "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion", "Classes and Parties in Their Attitude to Religion and the Church", "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism", "On the Significance of Militant Materialism" and others, Lenin formulated the programme for a proletarian party as regards religion and believers and outlined ways of carrying it out.

Developing the theses of Marx and Engels, Lenin taught Communists to distinguish between religion as an ideology alien to Marxism, on the one hand, and the working people who held religious beliefs, on the other. He insisted on careful, comradely concern for workers and peasants who believed in God. He urged Communists not to scorn the working people's religious prejudices, but rather to enlighten the believers tactfully and patiently while uniting them with the class-conscious proletariat in their joint struggle.<sup>2</sup> This proposition has always been a key principle in Communist Party policy toward religion and believers.

While stressing the uncompromising attitude of Marxism and the proletarian party to religion and the church, which defends exploitation and stupefies the working class, Lenin also believed it would be wrong to place the religious question in the foreground among the other tasks of the proletariat. If the problem were put this way, then religious, rather than political, motives would be artificially made top priorities. The religious di-

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Flüchtlingsliteratur", in: Marx, Engels, *Werke*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, Vol. 18, 1969, pp. 531-32.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "A New Revolutionary Workers' Association", *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 509.

vision of society is substituted for the class division. Lenin cautioned against slipping into an abstract, idealistic treatment of religion outside the context of class struggle. "It would be stupid to think that, in a society based on the endless oppression and coarsening of the worker masses, religious prejudices could be dispelled by purely propaganda methods,"<sup>1</sup> he wrote. Lenin thought the proletariat would be best enlightened on the religious issue by its own struggle against the dark forces of capitalism. He taught that a proletarian party's atheistic propaganda should be subordinated "to its basic task—the development of the class struggle of the exploited *masses* against the exploiters"<sup>2</sup> without permitting workers to be divided along religious lines. The class interests of the workers called for joint efforts by atheists and believers in their struggle against oppressors. Lenin considered the overcoming of religious prejudices to be closely linked to the working people's struggle against exploitation, to revolutionary transformation of society and to construction of socialism and communism.

Lenin extended and substantiated the major theoretical theses of the founders of Marxism on freedom of conscience and separation of church from state and school from church. He spoke resolutely against any coercion in matters of faith, any constraint or restriction of freedom of conscience. Having profoundly analysed the specific conditions and summed up the experience of the class struggle during preparations for the proletarian revolution, for its victory and construction of socialism, Lenin demonstrated that the clergy of pre-revolutionary Russia, united with the landowners and the bourgeoisie, had mercilessly exploited the masses. The church possessed enormous property and was a major proprietor which exploited the toiling masses. "The churches and monasteries own about six million dessiatines<sup>3</sup> of land,"<sup>4</sup> he wrote.

Pre-revolutionary Russia had about a thousand monasteries

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Socialism and Religion", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 406.

<sup>3</sup> 1 dessiatine=2.7 acres.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, "To the Rural Poor", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, p. 376.

and nunneries with a vast army of monks and nuns. Millions of peasants suffered because they had no land while there were 40 dessiatines of and per each monk or nun. Hundreds of thousands of hapless peasants toiled on the lands which belonged to monasteries, nunneries or churches. An interesting comparison: the Troitse-Sergiev Monastery had 106,000 serfs in the mid-18th century while Count Sheremetyev, who was the richest grandee at that time, had only 44,561 serfs. Church bank accounts were enormous. Thus, 60 million gold roubles were on the current account of the Holy Synod in 1906. In addition, the church kept millions of roubles in so-called "eternal deposits".

A close union between the exploiters and the church emerged over the centuries in pre-revolutionary Russia. The church was a *de facto* part of the exploitative state. The Russian Orthodox Church was headed by the Holy Synod, which was just another state department. Enveloping the imperial dynasty in a halo of holiness and protecting its foundations, the clergy tried to instil patience and love for the ruling classes in the minds of the masses. The churchmen threatened all those who rose to fight against the autocracy with chastisements on earth and in heaven in their sermons and religious writings.

The ruling classes of tsarist Russia followed double-dealing policy toward the faiths of non-Russian peoples. On the one hand, they crudely trod upon the freedom of conscience of non-Orthodox believers but, on the other, they supported the national priesthood—rabbis, mullahs, Roman Catholic priests and the like. The clergy of Russia's outlying national areas were equally zealous in endeavouring to hold the toiling masses in submission to local and central authorities.

Religious inequality was intertwined with national oppression. In multinational Russia the proletarian party was multinational too. This was the reason why even during the period when Lenin was creating a proletarian party, he paid constant attention to its attitude to religion, because quite a large part of the proletariat and peasantry, particularly in the country's outlying areas, were believers. It was imperative that the masses of believers be involved in the revolutionary movement, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the attempts of the coun-

ter-revolutionary forces to use the church as a bulwark of the old world were not to be ignored. All this called for the party's distinct and clear-cut policy in religious matters.

This policy was worked out by Lenin. He demonstrated in his writings that the fight against religious prejudices could only be successful during revolutionary transformation of the old social relations based on the masses' exploitation, backwardness and illiteracy. He recommended reliance on science in fighting religion and set an example himself of a scientific approach to the complex problems of overcoming religion. Even when he was only beginning his revolutionary work, along with his ideological struggle against anti-Marxist trends, Lenin often exposed the reactionary role played by religion and the church so as to unmask the reactionary nature of the autocratic system and rally revolutionary forces around the proletarian party. Between the late 1890s and 1907 alone Lenin raised religious issues more than 50 times. Articles such as "What Are Our Ministers Thinking About?", "Review of Home Affairs", "The New Factory Law", among many others, used concrete facts to show how downtrodden were the people by the spiritual oppression of religion and the church.

In his article entitled "Draft and Explanation of a Programme for the Social-Democratic Party", Lenin formulated the demand for struggle for religious freedom for the first time. Together with other general democratic targets in the programme of the revolutionary Social Democrats this helped arouse the oppressed masses to fight against the autocracy. It was especially important for Russia where Orthodoxy was the established church and there were laws against believers of different faiths.

In another article, "The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats", Lenin explained that, in denouncing absolutism, party propaganda should point out tsarism's hostility not only to the working class but also to other public groups, including persecuted religions and sects. He advised explaining to the workers that political oppression bore heavily on all the citizens, including representatives of oppressed religions and sects.

The political denunciations of the autocracy for persecuting non-Orthodox religions and sects, although very important, did

not make up the whole of the party line on religion. In his book *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin set the task for Social-Democrats to work out a practical programme for involving working people in the outlying national areas, whose religions and sects were persecuted, in the general democratic movement. The political denunciations were to convince non-Orthodox believers in the hostility of the autocracy and, as a result, to rouse, organise and rally together the working believers for the struggle against the autocracy under the slogans of revolutionary Social-Democracy.

Orthodoxy being the established church of Russia under the patronage of the tsarist government and all the other religions and faiths being just tolerated or intolaterated and persecuted, the Social Democrats' propaganda and agitation did a great deal to prove that absolutism was hostile to the working class and peasantry, as well as to the working people of the persecuted religions and sects. Lenin wrote in his work "To the Rural Poor" that among European countries only Russia and Turkey still maintained the shameful laws against adherents of religions different from the established ones: "These laws either totally ban a certain religion, or prohibit its propagation, or deprive those who belong to it of certain rights."<sup>1</sup> The admission of "dissenters" into educational institutions, for example, was restricted. They were not allowed to hold official government positions; there was a so-called Pale established for some ethnic groups of certain religions. They were prohibited to settle outside it. It was allowed to change Orthodoxy for another creed only as a rare exception.

In working on the Draft Party Programme in 1895, Lenin advanced the demand for freedom of religion.<sup>2</sup> Later, in 1902, he detailed and made more specific the Party's attitude to religion in his "Material for the Preparation of the Programme of the R.S.D.L.P.". He included the demands for unrestricted freedom of conscience and for separation of church from state and

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "To the Rural Poor", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 402.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Draft and Explanation of a Programme for the Social-Democratic Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 97.

of school from church which were made part of the final text of the Party Programme.<sup>1</sup> Lenin set a practical task for Party organisations to involve members of persecuted religions and sects in the general democratic movement. While showing the adherents of different religions how the autocracy oppressed them, it was necessary to rouse, organise and lead them to fight against tsarism under Social-Democratic slogans. Lenin's ideas regarding confiscation of lands owned by monasteries and churches were reflected in the Programme.

Freedom of conscience occupies a special place in Lenin's programme for active ideological struggle against religion. Meaning that freedom in matters of belief or unbelief is an elementary component of any really democratic state system, Lenin thoroughly substantiated and developed the theses of Marx and Engels that the working people could not be expected to be freed from mysticism and superstition without freedom of conscience. He held that real freedom of conscience was possible only when church was completely separated from state and school from church: "Complete separation of Church and State is what the socialist proletariat demands of the modern state and the modern church."<sup>2</sup>

Lenin formulated the general democratic principles which the proletarian party maintains in the sphere of freedom of conscience. "Everybody must be perfectly free, not only to profess whatever religion he pleases," Lenin wrote, "*but also to ... change his religion. ...* There should be no '*established*' religion or church. All religions and all churches should have equal status in the state."<sup>3</sup> In antagonistic societies, freedom of conscience is reduced at best to freedom of worship alone. Real freedom of conscience should include equality of rights for all citizens, whether they believe in God or not, and recognition of religion as a private affair. It allows free conversion from one faith into another, does not recognise any religion as the "es-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Material for the Preparation of the Programme of the R.S.D.L.P.," *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Socialism and Religion", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "To the Rural Poor", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 402.

established religion", provides for non-interference of church and state in each other's affairs and includes freedom of atheistic propaganda.

A key document outlining the Party's attitude toward religion was Lenin's article "Socialism and Religion", written in 1905. It clearly formulates the basic principles which a proletarian party should adhere to with respect to religion.

First, the Party believed that religion was a form of spiritual oppression. It was engendered by social injustice and the oppressed classes' impotence in their struggle against the exploiters and continued to be supported by capitalism's merciless exploitation of working people. "The deepest root of religion today is the socially downtrodden condition of the working masses and their apparently complete helplessness in face of the blind forces of capitalism, which every day and every hour inflicts upon ordinary working people the most horrible suffering and the most savage torment, a thousand times more severe than those inflicted by extraordinary events, such as wars, earthquakes, etc."<sup>1</sup> From this ensued the attitude of the proletarian party to religion, which involved resolute, uncompromising struggle until religious prejudice in the minds of the working people was entirely overcome.

Second, religion and religious consciousness could be overcome only in class struggle, i.e. the struggle against religion was to be subordinated to the struggle for socialism. That was why Lenin spoke resolutely against advancing the religious question to first place—because it did not belong there at all in real life, in the working people's struggle to liberate themselves from the oppression of the exploiters. He stressed that the working people's unity in the struggle for the creation of paradise on earth was more important than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven.

Third, Lenin explained the political meaning of the democratic demand for freedom of conscience and gave it a proletarian interpretation, arguing that it also included the freedom of atheism, i.e. the right not to profess any religion. This de-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, pp. 405-06.



mand was especially important for old Russia, in which shameful laws against atheists and non-Orthodox believers were still in force.

Fourth, Lenin thoroughly explained the need for a complete separation of church from state and school from church. He proved that this demand was one of the most important guarantees of freedom of conscience. While insisting on the principle of freedom of conscience, Lenin emphasised that the Party opposed all religions (whether established or persecuted) with ideological weapons, the Party press, and persuasion.

*Lenin's Struggle Against Opportunistic Views  
on the Party's Attitude to Religion*

Inasmuch as the attitude to religion is one of the most complex questions in the Party policy, Lenin repeatedly stressed the need for patient, insistent work to liberate the working people from religious influence. He sharply criticised those who wanted to declare open war on religion. Such leftist demands only revived interest in religion and hindered the process of religious prejudices dying out. The open war on religion interferes with consolidating working masses of different faiths and makes their struggle against exploiters more difficult.

In his article "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion", Lenin spoke against another misguided idea. There was a clause in the German Social Democrats' Erfurt Programme, adopted at the Party's Congress in 1891, concerning its attitude to religion. This clause had been introduced into the programme after a long battle waged by Engels against the Blanquists and Dühring who preached extreme intolerance of religion. The sharp reproof administered by Engels to the Blanquists and Dühring came to be interpreted by opportunists, even while Engels was still alive, as meaning that the proletarian party considered religion a private affair. In other words, they tried to extrapolate the thesis that religion was a private affair from the domain of the state to that of the party. Engels drew attention to the folly of such an interpretation and spoke resolutely against such opportunistic distortions in his introduction to Marx's *The Civil War in France*.

To make clear the general democratic principles of freedom

of conscience, Lenin stressed that a man's faith was a private affair as far as the state was concerned, but not as far as the socialist proletariat's party was. The Communist Party is an association of advanced, class-conscious workers. "Such an association," Lenin wrote, "cannot and must not be indifferent to lack of class-consciousness, ignorance or obscurantism in the shape of religious beliefs. . . . Our Programme is based entirely on the scientific, and moreover the materialist, world-outlook. An explanation of our Programme, therefore, necessarily includes an explanation of the true historical and economic roots of the religious fog."<sup>1</sup> This is why the Communists have never concealed the fact that they are combating religion but, as Lenin taught, only with ideological weapons, and the ideological struggle waged by Communists cannot be a private affair. If one "declared religion to be a private matter" in relation to the Party, Lenin pointed out, then the role of the Party as the leader would be degraded "to the level of the most vulgar 'free-thinking' philistinism, which is prepared to allow a non-denominational status, but which renounces the *party* struggle against the opium of religion which stupefies the people".<sup>2</sup>

The anarchists accused the Bolsheviks of inconsistency, of wavering between war with God and an alleged desire to "play up" to religious workers so as not to scare them away from the revolutionary path. Lenin proved the complete unsoundness of such charges in his article "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion". He ridiculed those who expressed such opinions, calling them dilettantes, slapdash in their attitude to Marxism. Lenin also pointed out the falsity of the charge that the Marxist party took a moderate stand on religion for tactical considerations.

Lenin's works written to elaborate the Party Programme demonstrated how cruelly tsarist Russia persecuted and violated all the democratic freedoms. He exposed the alliance between the ruling classes and the established Orthodox Church, denounced the oppressive police and clerical control of people's con-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Socialism and Religion", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The State and Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 454.

science and revealed the cruel harassment and constraint of civil rights of non-Orthodox believers and atheists, the peoples of the Volga Area, Siberia, and the Far East, oppressed by tsarism and converted by force to Orthodoxy.

Taking Russian reality as an example, Lenin showed that the ruling classes, the bourgeoisie and landowners used religion to preserve the monarchy and to crush the mass revolutionary movement. But while the nobility sought to preserve the old patriarchal church intact, the bourgeoisie spoke in favour of its renewal. In contrast to many European countries, the Russian bourgeoisie did not advance any demands for separation of church from state and school; they only wanted the church to be free from the police control imposed by the state.

The needs of developing capitalism compelled the bourgeoisie to face the problem of reformation in the church so that the church could perform new social functions while the reactionaries tried to maintain the old conditions accepted by the nobility and feudals.

Drawing attention to attempts by the bourgeois Cadet Party (Constitutional Democrats) to fool the workers and peasants by religious means, Lenin pointed out that in this issue "the standpoint of the Cadets . . . merely expresses the efforts of 'cultured' capital to bamboozle the people with religious narcotics by more refined methods of Church deception than the ones now practised by the rank-and-file Russian priests who are still living in the past."<sup>1</sup> Although representatives of the bourgeoisie and landowners turned bourgeois wished the church's authority to be preserved and its influence enhanced, they were opposed to crude methods of ideological brainwashing of the masses and for new and effective devices of such brainwashing.

Cruel repressions launched after the defeat of the 1905 Revolution were accompanied by ideological attacks. It was then that Lenin wrote: "...The Russian bourgeoisie for its counter-revolutionary purposes felt a need to revive religion, increase the demand for religion, invent religion, inoculate the people with religion or strengthen the hold of religion on them in new forms."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin. "Classes and Parties in Their Attitude to Religion and the Church", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 420.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Faction of Supporters of Otvovism and God-

Sergei Bulgakov, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Nikolai Berdyaev, and Zinaida Gippius, fashionable writers of that time, even founded a whole new school that was named "God-seeking". Frightened by the revolution, they began looking for ways of spreading religion among the masses. The God-seekers slandered the people's revolution and socialism and praised treason, pessimism and decadence. Supported by the government, they preached idealism and religious superstition, and attacked and monstrously distorted Marxism. With an unheard-of zeal, bourgeois scholars, authors and journalists "refuted" the theoretical foundations of the Marxist party: dialectical and historical materialism. They tried to propagate idealism and religious superstition with their distorted interpretations of achievements in the natural sciences.

The Party warded off reactionary ideological attacks though some Party intellectuals (Valentinov, Yushkevich, Bogdanov, Bazarov, Lunacharsky and others) proved to be ideologically unstable. In their quest for a religion acceptable to the proletariat and under the pretext of "improving" and "correcting" Marxism, they spoke against its very foundations, preaching "unification of Marxism with religion" and so on. Lenin exposed the reactionary essence of this movement in his book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, revealing its groundlessness and negative effects.

To expose the political clericalism of the Russian bourgeoisie, Lenin wrote several works—"Liberals and Clericals", "The Priesthood in the Elections, and Elections with the Priesthood", "Concerning the Workers' Deputies to the Duma and Their Declaration" and "Results of the Elections". He showed how the Russian ruling classes used the clergy and the church to enslave the working people.

Tsarism had been cruelly oppressing the peoples of the outlying national areas for many centuries. The ruling classes were afraid of the working people's international solidarity and sought to split the revolutionary forces according to nationality of their members. National discord was stirred up by activities of

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Building", *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, p. 44,

many religious preachers. However, religious and national conflicts had the same class basis and pursued the same end: to divide the lower classes in the interests of the upper classes. The upper classes themselves would always find a common language between themselves. In his article, "The Working Class and the National Question", Lenin noted the desire of the exploitative classes to divide the working people along religious lines while they themselves got along splendidly together. "Orthodox Christians and Jews, Russians and Germans, Poles and Ukrainians, everyone who possesses *capital*, exploit the workers of all nations in company,"<sup>1</sup> he wrote.

Mercilessly oppressing the working people regardless of their religion, the bourgeoisie and the clergy often cover up the oppression with speculations about the "interests" of a nation or the "needs" for development of national culture. Lenin exposed the falsity of such statements, pointing out that under the cover of the slogan of "national culture" the Black Hundreds<sup>2</sup> and clericals did their reactionary and dirty business, and the slogan of "national culture" in the mouth of the ruling classes was nothing else but the Black-Hundred and clerical deception in the interests of the landowners, the clergy and the bourgeoisie.

In tsarist Russia, this slogan strengthened militant clericalism and bourgeois nationalism. Lenin cited an example in his article "How Does Bishop Nikon Defend the Ukrainians?" A bill on the Ukrainian-language schools and societies was presented to the State Duma. Bishop Nikon was the first to sign the bill, but of course he did not care about developing national cultures or Ukrainian culture. Bishop Nikon, Lenin noted, begged the Great-Russian landowners for privileges to be granted to Ukrainians on the grounds that they were brothers under Christ while Jews, for example, were people of foreign extraction. Lenin used this example to show the nature of clerical-bourgeois national-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Working Class and the National Question", *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Black Hundreds—the name given to members of the pogrom-monarchistic organisations, such as The Union of the Russian People and The Union of Archangel Michael and derived from the Black Hundreds, armed gangs organised of déclassé elements to fight against the revolutionary movement in Russia between 1905 and 1917.

ism: a Christ-loving deputy to the Duma had spoken openly in defence of interests of one nation at the expense of the other that was to be suppressed.<sup>1</sup> The ruling classes of Russia were afraid of international solidarity of the working people and tried to prevent it and to split the revolutionary forces according to religion while the clergy helped them as much as they could. Under the circumstances, the Party's activities to rally the working masses in the internationalist spirit were of paramount importance. The clear-cut Party policy in the religious sphere and the democratic principles of freedom of conscience, formulated by Lenin, were instrumental in this work for internationalist education of Russia's working people.

Opportunism inside proletarian parties does serious harm to the internationalist unity of working people and to revolutionary movements in general, especially when in alliance with religion. In Russia, the alliance of opportunism and the priesthood was a logical result in the development of the two versions of capitalism's ideological defence. Lenin repeatedly drew attention to the connection between opportunism and clericalism. His article "What Next?" said: "The opportunists are bourgeois enemies of the proletarian revolution, who in peaceful times carry on their bourgeois work in secret, concealing themselves within the workers' parties, while in times of crisis they *immediately* prove to be open allies of the *entire* united bourgeoisie, from the conservative to the most radical and democratic part of the latter, from the free-thinkers, to the religious and clerical sections."<sup>2</sup>

Karl Kautsky, an ideologist of opportunism, even tried to defend religious ideology on theoretical grounds. He divided religion into "interior" and "exterior" ones, into essence and form and spirit and organisation. He argued that it was not religion which was reactionary but the church. Religion was ostensibly neutral in class struggle. Kautsky idealised early Christianity and preached the identity between socialism and religion. Exposing Kautsky's opportunism, Lenin wrote that "Kautsky has turned Marxism into a most hideous and stupid counter-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "How Does Bishop Nikon Defend the Ukrainians?", *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, p. 380.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "What Next?", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 110.

revolutionary theory, into the lowest kind of clericalism."<sup>1</sup>

Present-day renegades, such as Ernst Fischer, Roger Garaudy, Ernst Bloch and the like, who openly defend religion and clericalism, do not go far beyond Kautsky. In their arbitrary interpretations of the propositions of the founders of Marxism on religion's meaning and social function, they try to prove that the thesis of religion having always been the opiate of the people never belonged to Marx. They ascribe a positive role to religion in social progress, in the liberation movement of the oppressed classes and in the development of culture and civilisation. Garaudy argues, for example, that religion cannot be opposed to science without reservation because, allegedly, there are both contradiction and continuity between them. Therefore a Communist Party, claims Garaudy, should be above materialism and idealism, religion and atheism. Garaudy and his supporters assert that religion has changed so much to the better that its description by Marx, Engels and Lenin is no longer applicable. The speculations about some abrupt turn in the history of the church, about a "radical" reappraisal of religious values were needed for the renegades to justify their bows to religion. They deliberately conceal the indisputable fact that nowadays, just as in the past, there still exists the socio-political and ideological platform of joint actions of opportunism and the clergy against the proletarian concept of freedom of conscience.

Lenin set the task for the Communists to expose the alliance of opportunism and the clergy. The Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, conciliatory petty-bourgeois parties in Russia, paid lip-service to disestablishment of the church and even included the demand for freedom of conscience into their programmes but took pains to strengthen their alliance with the clergy and betrayed the interests of workers and peasants. After the autocracy was overthrown, they supported the Provisional Government that made good use of religious organisations to consolidate the counter-revolutionary forces. The conciliatory parties, together with the clergy, launched political campaigns in support of the bourgeoisie's domestic and foreign policies.

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Collapse of the Second International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 232.

Allied with the priests, the petty-bourgeois parties advocated the slogan of "war to the victorious end" and slandered the Bolshevik Party and its leader, Lenin.

*Religion and the Church after the Overthrow  
of Autocracy*

When the autocracy was overthrown and the Provisional Government set up, the Orthodox priests as well as the clergy of other religions began to serve their new master zealously. The prayers "for the blessed Emperor" were replaced by prayers "for the blessed Provisional Government". The clergy assured the Provisional Government from the start that they would be its "natural associate and accomplice". Thus, an epistle of the Russian Orthodox Synod said: "God's will has been done. Russia has taken the path of a new state life. . . . The Holy Synod is praying to the Lord Almighty with fervour, may He bless the labours and undertakings of the Provisional Government." On March 6, 1917, the Synod ordered that the manifestoes on abdications of Nikolai Romanov and Mikhail Romanov should be read in all the churches and "the prayer should be pronounced for the prolongation of days of the God-protected Russian power and of its Provisional Government" and that the prayer for the dead of the Imperial House should be ceased as of March 7.

Although, as Lenin noted, freedom of conscience and separation of church from state and school from church are measures for the bourgeois-democratic revolution to take, the bourgeoisie never carried out completely anywhere this demand that it had set forth itself. As early as the first days after the fall of tsarism, the Bolsheviks sought to obtain separation of church from state and school from church and were against the alliance between the Provisional Government and the church. "In its manifesto," Lenin wrote, "the new government promises every kind of freedom, but has failed in its direct and unconditional duty immediately . . . to introduce not only freedom of religion, but also freedom from religion, immediately separate the school from the church and free it of control by government officials, etc."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Draft Theses, March 4 (17), 1917", *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 289.



The Russian bourgeoisie, when in power, did not even contemplate abolition of the age-old privileges of the Orthodox Church. On the contrary, it did its best to strengthen the authority of religious institutions. The Provisional Government left intact all the church departments that had existed under tsarist regime and preserved all the privileges of the clergy. Having adopted the decree "On Freedom of Conscience" in the form of a general declaration of July 14, 1917, the Provisional Government retained the right of state bodies to control religion of minors, and to formalise legally the refusal of a citizen to profess any religion or conversion from one religion to another, considered Orthodox faith to be the only true religion, continued to regard priests as government officials; it was in charge of their appointments and promotions, awarded them orders and medals and paid pensions from the state treasury.

The old church machinery was left completely intact. Moreover, additional measures were taken to strengthen the position of the church and to make it more active in the struggle against the forthcoming revolution. The Provisional Government did not contemplate the separation of church from state and school from church and, moreover, transformed the Synod into the Religion Ministry and expanded the sphere of interference of state bodies into the affairs of religious organisations. The Provisional Government looked to religion and the church for support. Just as the autocracy, it valued highly this well-tried and reliable instrument for spiritual oppression of the working people. The economic, political, legal and other foundations of religion remained unchanged under the Provisional Government. The problems of freedom of conscience, as well as other problems vital for the working masses, such as peace, land and transfer of power to the Soviets, were also left unresolved.

Having declared the limited freedom of conscience, the Provisional Government never brought itself to separate church from state and school from church even formally. These matters were settled only by the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution.

The Bolshevik activities in exposing the reactionary church and Lenin's articles published in the press on the Party's policy toward religion helped to educate the masses in a revolutionary

spirit and rally them together to fight for democratisation of the social system and for socialism.

Lenin has armed the Party with Marxist strategy and tactics in regard to religion and the church, and outlined ways of overcoming religious ideology, linking these activities with further revolutionary development. Lenin elaborated the proletarian conception of freedom of conscience, practical questions of the Communist Party's attitude to religion and believers and thus helped in no small degree to form the political army of the revolution and to rally workers and peasants around the Leninist party.

The pre-October activities of the Communist Party with regard to religion and the church were directed entirely to the exposure of their reactionary and anti-scientific meaning and connections with the interests of the exploitative classes. While leading the masses in an assault on the old exploitative society, the Leninist party also had, in addition to a clear-cut programme of radical social and economic reforms, a clear perspective for the attitude of the proletarian state toward religion, church and believers.

The victory of the October Socialist Revolution in Russia ushered in a new era in world history. It radically changed the positions of all the classes and strata of the population. The proletariat became the ruling class. The Communist Party turned into the ruling party of the world's first socialist state.

The overthrow of the exploitative classes and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat created conditions for complete freedom in religious belief or unbelief in the Soviet Union. All the laws that had restricted people's rights in religious convictions were abolished in the very first days of Soviet power and entirely new laws on religion and the church were formulated on the basis of Lenin's theories. The new Soviet state adopted a decree entitled "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church" drafted with Lenin's direct participation.

## CHAPTER 2

### **LENIN'S DECREE "ON THE SEPARATION OF THE CHURCH FROM THE STATE AND THE SCHOOL FROM THE CHURCH" AND ITS HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE**

#### *First Decrees of Soviet Power*

In the very first days of its existence, the Soviet state adopted a number of statutes which laid the foundation of a new society free from any social and spiritual oppression. The Great October Socialist Revolution abolished private ownership of the means of production. The establishment of public ownership of land, factories, plants, and nationalisation of banks by the proletarian state paved the way for removal of the main root of religion—the rule of capital in all its forms. The first decrees of Soviet power—the Decree on Land, for instance—embodied Lenin's ideas on abolishing the church's economic and spiritual power over the working people. In response to a desire by wide sections of the peasantry, Soviet power put an end to the centuries-old alliance between the church and the state with its very first legislative act. The Decree says: "All land, whether *state, crown, monastery, church, factory*, entailed, private, public, peasant, etc., shall be *confiscated without compensation* and become the property of the whole people..." The socialist revolution thus deprived the church of property rights to land, thus beginning separation of the church from the state and creating economic guarantees for complete freedom of conscience.

In accordance with the Decree, all lands owned by monasteries and churches were not only taken away in favour of the working people but, in the future, no land could become the property of private persons or religious organisations and institutions. "The landed estates," said the Decree on Land, "as also all crown, monastery, and church lands, with all their livestock, implements, building and everything pertaining thereto, shall be

placed at the disposal of the volost land committees and the uyezd Soviets of Peasants' Deputies. . . ." At the same time, Soviet power did not limit the rights to use land for religious reasons. The Decree on Land stressed that the right to use land was granted to all citizens, without distinction of sex, nationality or faith.

The proletarian state abolished the privileges of the Orthodox Church. All religions and sects were granted equal rights to organise worship for their members.

It would not be out of place to note here that the enemies of socialism have recently launched a noisy campaign ostensibly for democracy and human rights, trying to convince the lay public that the USSR and other socialist countries are restricting freedoms and human rights. And they deliberately conceal the fact that the October Revolution in Russia as well as later revolutions in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America have been carried out in order to assert the most vital human rights of the overwhelming majority of the population in those countries. It is universal knowledge, for instance, that the Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia, adopted by the Soviet government in November 1917 was of historical significance for guaranteeing human rights and sundering the age-old ties between the state and religion. The Declaration spoke about the abrogation of "each and every national and national-religious privilege and restriction". It emphasised that the old policy of the overthrown classes who had set one nationality against another was to be replaced henceforth by the policy of a voluntary and honest alliance between the peoples of Russia. The Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia was followed by a special appeal, To All the Working Moslems of Russia and the East, in which the Soviet government once again told the peoples oppressed in the past that from then on their faiths and customs, national and cultural institutions were declared free and inviolable. All the nations of the old Russia's outlying areas were given equal rights alongside all citizens in the Land of Soviets. "Be informed," the Appeal said, "that your rights, just as the rights of all the peoples of Russia, are protected by the entire power of the revolution and of its bodies, the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies." The Appeal explained

specifically that Soviet power had done away for good with the oppression and restriction of rights of Moslems in Russia, the Volga Area, Turkestan and Transcaucasia. The democratic principles of equality of all religions thus became the new society's way of life.

Soviet power's respectful attitude toward customs and faiths of the formerly backward peoples and the realisation of the principles of freedom of conscience in practice were demonstrated to Islamic nations by the return of the Koran of Osman, revered by Moslems the world over as one of the most ancient holy books for Moslems.

In December 1917, representatives of Moslems living in Petrograd and its environs met for their first legal congress. Expressing the desire of all Russia's Moslems, the congress asked the Council of People's Commissars to return the Holy Koran of Osman to the Moslem faithful. The RSFSR Council of People's Commissars decided on December 9, 1917, "to give back immediately the Holy Koran of Osman to the Territorial Moslem Congress".

To separate church from state and school from church, as required by the Party Programme, the Soviet state, from its very start, adopted legislation on the position of the church and religious institutions under the new state system which guaranteed the right to freedom in belief or unbelief. That was precisely the reason why the proclamation of real freedom of conscience, of the principle of equality for all religions by decrees of the young Soviet state were acknowledged with satisfaction not only in Central Russia but by believers of outlying national areas as well.

The young Soviet state took special care to do away with the age-old domination of religion in education. The teaching of the Scriptures was compulsory in all educational establishments of pre-revolutionary Russia. Priests spied on progressively-minded teachers at school and cut short any attempt to explain the absurdity of superstition to their pupils.

The tsarist government spent enormous money to stupefy the people with religion, but only small amounts were allotted for public education. Thus, the tsarist government allotted 46 million gold roubles for the church machinery in 1912, which was

much more than was appropriated for the Ministry of Public Education. Russia remained one of the world's most backward countries in terms of educational standards until the late 19th century. Public education was controlled by ignorant priests. Parish schools employed 50 thousand priests as teachers. Half the classroom time was allotted for learning prayers by heart and studying religious rituals. It was very difficult for the children of working people to enter a secondary school. About three-quarters of the population were illiterate, including 83 per cent of women. In the mid-19th century there was only one literate person for every 135 illiterates in Russia, while in Austria the proportion was 1 to 14, in France 1 to 11, and in Britain 1 to 9. Lenin wrote in "The Question of Ministry of Education Policy" that, while 22 per cent of the population in Russia was of school age, only 4.7 per cent attended school. "This means that about *four-fifths* of the children and adolescents of Russia are *deprived* of public education!"<sup>1</sup>

The unbelievable backwardness of tsarist Russia in education resulted from absolute power of the land- and serf owners, and from the dominance of the church in education. The founders of scientific communism considered it one of the tasks of a proletarian revolution to replace religious instruction in all general schools with secular teaching and to substitute a schoolteacher for a priest in the classroom.

The Communist Party and the Soviet state were the first in history to carry out these plans of the founders of scientific communism into practice. On December 11, 1917 a decree, "On the Transfer of Education and Instruction from the Department on Religions to the Authority of the People's Commissariat for Education," signed by Lenin, was published. It proposed that the former Department on Religions should transfer to the authority of the People's Commissariat for Education "all the parish schools (primary one-year and two-year schools), teachers' seminaries . . . schools for training missionaries, academies and all other primary, secondary and higher schools and institutions under different names . . . with their personnel, appropriated funds,

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Question of Ministry of Education Policy", *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, p. 139.

fixed and movable property, i.e. with buildings, barns, land under the buildings and lands necessary for schools, with estates (if any), with libraries and any aids and textbooks, valuables, capitals, securities and interest thereon, and with everything which was intended for the above schools and institutions". Thus the age-old domination of the church in public education came to an end. In accordance with this Decree, the People's Commissariat for Education issued an order which abolished the religious instructors for all denominations in all educational establishments and the State Commission for Public Education adopted a decision entitled "On Secular School" on February 5(18), 1918.

All the people of old Russia were obliged to profess some religion. The law did not permit a "non-religious state". Any organisation or person who wanted to spread atheistic views was persecuted. The Code of Laws of the autocracy included more than a thousand articles which instructed the police to see that there was "proper respect for faith". Celebration of rituals was introduced under compulsion. The church and the state intruded into people's private lives and crudely treaded upon freedom of conscience. The church was the supreme authority in matrimonial relations. Civil marriage was practically non-existent and outlawed in Russia. Even if he or she did not believe in God, a person had to marry in church, and baptism was the only official ceremony for registration of the newly-born. Marriages, registration of births, deaths and divorce were in the hands of the church. Tsarist legislation prohibited marriages between Christians and non-Christians. One could only marry at a certain time of year for religious considerations. Thus, there were no more than 120 or 130 days out of 365 days of year when persons officially recognised as Christians could be married in church.

On December 18, 1917 the ARCEC (All-Russia Central Executive Committee) and the Council of People's Commissars approved a decree "On Civil Marriage, On Children and On Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths". This Decree guaranteed all the citizens complete freedom to marry in church and to be registered in church books, but such a marriage was to be a private affair of believers. Only civil marriage was recognised

to be binding. The Decree stressed that henceforth the church marriage or divorce would not be of legal force and would not entail mutual legal obligations between man and wife. Citizens who wished to exercise their conjugal rights would have to register in local offices.

The registration of births and deaths was also made civil. The Decree said: "All religious and administrative institutions who were formerly in charge of registration of marriages, births and deaths according to ceremonies of whatever religious cults are ordered to send these registries to appropriate local administrations of cities, uyezds and volosts."

From the very first days of Soviet power, marriages have been registered in the presence of witnesses, relatives, friends and acquaintances whom parties to the marriage can invite to participate in the solemn ceremony. In the USSR, marriages are registered only in rooms on the premises of local registry offices intended specially for the purpose. By law, the religion of either of the party is not recorded.

Lenin regarded the break from the old marriage laws as a great gain of Soviet power. "Even the slightest acquaintance with the legislation of bourgeois countries on marriage, divorce and illegitimate children, and with the actual state of affairs in this field," he pointed out, "is enough to show anyone interested in the subject that modern bourgeois democracy, even in all the most democratic bourgeois republics, exhibits a truly feudal attitude in this respect towards women..."<sup>1</sup> Of course, old Russia was no exception. The church wedding ceremony "for good" was a source of family tragedies. Women were in an especially humiliating position. Children born out of wedlock were restricted in their civil rights.

Soviet marriage legislation, based on humanism, precludes any vestiges of serfdom in conjugal ties. It was for this reason that, on December 16(29), 1917 the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars adopted a decree "On Dissolution of Marriage", applying to all the citizens of the republic, regardless of their religion. Later on, in

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "On the Significance of Militant Materialism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p.235.



1918, special registry offices were established under the auspices of local Soviets. They were placed in charge of registering marriages, births and deaths and of issuing the appropriate documents.

The organisation of these offices was of great importance in emancipating people's minds from the influence of religion because the church was deprived henceforth of its monopoly in the legal registration of the newly-born, marriages and divorces. The Decree did not prohibit marriages in church but proclaimed that, in future, the Russian Republic would recognise only civil marriages. Legal relations between husband and wife and between parents and children have thus become independent of the church.

The ARCEC Code of Legislation on Registration of Marriages, Births and Deaths and on Marriage, Family and Guardianship was adopted on September 16, 1918. The Code abolished the church and religious restrictions for marriages. Persons of different faiths, monks, nuns, ordained priests or deacons, as well as persons who had vowed to be celibate, even if they were representatives of the clergy, were allowed to marry.

Lenin said in his speech at the 1st All-Russia Congress of Working Women on November 19, 1918 that Soviet power, having broken the chains of capitalist slavery, had eliminated all the restrictions on women's rights. "It will soon be a year now," said Lenin, "since complete freedom of divorce was legislated. We have passed a decree annulling all distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children and removing political restrictions. Nowhere else in the world have equality and freedom for working women been so fully established. . . . For the first time in history, our law has removed everything that denied women rights."<sup>1</sup>

The legislative acts of the young Soviet state abolished all the state offices which supervised the affairs of the clergy and ceased providing state funds for religious needs. Thus, the Department of Court Priesthood was abolished by a special order of the Council of People's Commissars of January 14, 1918 and the

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin. "Speech at the First All-Russia Congress of Working Women. November 19, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 180.

People's Commissar for Military Affairs issued an order to disband the Military Chaplains Department in the Army on January 16, 1918.

On November 21 (December 4), 1917 the Council of People's Commissars chaired by Lenin met to discuss a proposal that the payment of funds to church institutions from the treasury should be forbidden. The Council supported the proposal and recommended that a decree on disestablishment of the church be adopted. Accordingly, the People's Commissariat of Charity ordered in January 1918 that economic ties between the church and the state be abolished. Based on the decision of the Council of People's Commissars, and in accordance with the order of the People's Commissariat of Charity all clergymen who had received a salary from the treasury were to be given a month's pay. As of March 1, 1918 the state bodies ceased to pay out money from the treasury for church maintenance. Religious services and rituals could continue without hindrance provided the believers undertook to keep their clergymen, places of worship and church-plate at their own expense.

All the measures of the Soviet state, including such actions as the confiscation of lands belonging to churches and monasteries, the removal of the clergy from registration of marriages, births and deaths and transfer of those functions to secular authorities, the abolition of religious administration of public education and instruction and the end to state financing of church institutions, were carried out painlessly and with the approval of the masses. The former domination of the church was eliminated by the Soviet authorities very tactfully, without hurting religious feelings of the believers. Believers of all denominations were allowed to gather for public worship and to celebrate religious ceremonies and rituals unimpeded.

### *The First Counter-Revolutionary Actions of Churchmen*

These measures taken by the Soviet government met with fierce opposition from the overthrown exploitative classes and church dignitaries. The secular counter-revolutionaries went hand-in-hand with the church counter-revolutionaries. The clergy vigorously assisted the overthrown classes. Anti-Soviet actions by

the clergy were inspired by Council of the Russian Orthodox Church. The idea of convening the Council had been set forth under the Provisional Government, and it met on August 15, 1917 expressing support for General Kornilov's counter-revolutionary revolt and continued its deliberations after the October Revolution.

After Soviet power had been established, the Council hurried to restore the Patriarchate and elect a Patriarch—the institution abolished by Peter the Great long ago. The forms of church management are, of course, an internal affair for the church but at that point in history, the hasty decision to reestablish the Patriarchate surprised even many members of the Council. “And generally speaking, all this haste with elections,” said Archpriest P. I. Leporsky at the Council, “reminds me of making a shroud for the deceased rather than a garb for a live man.” Speaking against such sentiments, princes of the church did not even try to conceal the counter-revolutionary nature of the plan to restore the Patriarchate. “The matter of the restoration of the Patriarchate can't be put off,” said Metropolitan Metrophanes of Astrakhan. “Russia's on fire, everything is perishing. And can we now waste time arguing that we need some way to gather forces, to unite Russia? When war is on, one leader is needed; an army is in disorder without him.” The overthrown classes wanted to have a new leader in the person of the Patriarch. The reactionary clerical and secular forces thought that the elected Patriarch would be like a banner in their struggle against Soviet power.

On November 5 (18), 1917 Metropolitan Tikhon of Moscow (Vasily Belavin when a layman), a monarchist and Black-Hundreds sympathiser, was elected Patriarch. “What do we expect of the Patriarch, what will he be for Russia?”, said Metropolitan Metrophanes at the Council. He then answered himself: “In the present circumstances he must, first thing, gather all active religious forces of the people and inspire them to the feat of serving the ancient behests that Russia was built upon and lived by.” The Local Council headed by the elected primate became the organiser of the struggle by the Russian Orthodox Church against Soviet power. The Council could not help taking this stand. It was composed of 174 church dignitaries, 15 princes and counts,

22 landowners, 41 bourgeois, 10 high-ranking military officers, 132 officials of the old administration, and 62 representatives of the bourgeois intelligentsia.

The secular and ecclesiastical magnates overthrown by Soviet power hated to part with their privileges and enormous wealth amassed through robbing exploited men of their labour. Even after the major decrees of Soviet power had been issued and were carried out, the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church adopted on December 2, 1917 The Enactment on Legal Status of the Church in Russia which tried to vindicate the privileges and benefits of the Russian Orthodox Church that it had enjoyed for centuries under the old regime. The Orthodox Church, said the document, "holds the pre-eminent public and legal position in Russian state among other denominations". It went on to say that in all cases of the state life, when the state turns to religion, it was to give preference to the Orthodox Church. It was to be understood that the church should enjoy privileges and support rendered by the state just as before. Moreover, the Enactment demanded that "Head of Russian State, the Minister for Religious Affairs and the Minister for Public Education and their deputies" should always be of Orthodox denomination.

The Enactment specified that the church should retain the right to register marriages, births and deaths, to teach religion at all schools, and that all schools run directly by the church should be preserved intact. In essence, it wanted to retain all the provisions of the tsarist government legislation which legalised the privileges of the Orthodox Church and priests. There was also a demand that the Church should keep all its property with the right to enter into commercial transactions without restrictions.

The clergy of other denominations also resisted Soviet power. Ministers of Catholic and Protestant religions, of Judaism and Islam, in conjunction with representatives of the overthrown classes, tried in every way to sabotage the radical reforms provided for by Soviet decrees. Incited by the anti-Soviet top hierarchy, many priests continued to serve the old system. They gambled on the religious feelings of believers and spread lies about alleged harassment and persecution of the church and believers; they tried to stir up the masses to the anti-Soviet struggle.

Although their anti-Soviet activities did not enjoy support and sympathy from the broad masses of working people, including believers among workers and peasants, the counter-revolutionary actions of the churchmen did not stop. It was necessary to deprive the church of the opportunity to utilise its places of worship handed over to the parishioners for free use for political manipulations and organisation of the struggle against Soviet power. Legislation was needed to abolish forever the church's former privileges, reserving only the right for religious organisations to perform religious rituals and ceremonies. It was necessary to formulate clearly believers' right to freely worship any religion and, in addition, to guarantee full freedom to those citizens who had scientific and materialistic views and were atheists. It was important to sum up the previous activities of the young Soviet state in ensuring freedom of conscience, as well as adopting a law that would express in a concentrated form the policy of the proletarian party toward religion, church and believers.

In addition, believers, who were in an overwhelming majority, had to be brought into effective public, political and economic activities and all the governing bodies had to be directed to avoid highhanded actions, so as not to offend believers' religious feelings.

### *Birth of Lenin's Decree*

The young Soviet state had no precedents to follow in devising statutes to reflect citizens' complete freedom in religion's matters. It could only use the legal practice of the Paris Commune. The Paris Communards had issued a decree on April 2, 1871 which proceeded from the first principle of the French Republic—the principle of freedom—and, taking into account "that freedom of conscience is the most important of all freedoms", proclaimed separation of the church from the state and abolition of the budget for religious purposes because it "taxes citizens contrary to their own convictions". The decree declared everything belonging to religious organisations to be national property and ordered "to register and place it at the disposal of the nation". The Commune abolished the religious oath and decided that religious symbols should be removed from schools and prayers be stopped there.

Marx highly praised these very important measures of the Paris Commune. He put it to the credit of the Communards that they undertook straightaway "to break the spiritual force of repression, the 'parson-power', by the disestablishment and disendowment of all churches as proprietary bodies. The priests were sent back to the recesses of private life, there to feed upon the alms of the faithful in imitation of their predecessors, the Apostles. The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of church. . . ."<sup>1</sup> But as noted by the founders of Marxism there were also some mistakes made by the Communards in their actions with respect to religion. Having announced that religion was the cause of all the shortcomings and injustice, the Communards thought it possible to ban religion by legal and administrative measures. However, any attempt to ban religion is unrealistic and incompatible with real freedom of conscience.

The Soviet republic regarded freedom of conscience as an important principle of democratic freedoms. In late 1917, M. V. Galkin, an Orthodox priest, sent a letter to the Council of People's Commissars suggesting that the separation of church from state should be legalised by one decree. Galkin attached his article on the subject to the letter and asked to publish it in the press. The letter was discussed by a meeting of the Council of People's Commissars, chaired by Lenin. Galkin's article was published in *Pravda* on December 16, 1917 as "First Steps Toward Separation of Church from State". The author proposed urgent measures for disestablishment of the church, to proclaim all the church and religious communities as private associations and religion to be a private affair. The teaching of Scriptures at schools was to be made optional and certification of births, marriages and deaths was to be placed in charge of special bodies under the new government. The proposal to adopt a single statute of the Soviet state on freedom of conscience was unanimously supported by workers and peasants.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France", in: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 2, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 220.

The counter-revolutionary clergy put up every possible resistance to adoption of new Soviet laws regulating the relations between the state and the church organisations. In particular, epistles of Patriarch Tikhon and a letter of Metropolitan Veniamin of Petrograd to the Council of People's Commissars pursued that end. They used threats and demanded that the Soviet government rescind the adopted decrees and not endorse a new decree guaranteeing all citizens the right to believe or not believe in God.

The RSFSR Council of People's Commissars met on December 11(24), 1917 under Lenin's chairmanship to discuss "acceleration of the process of disestablishment of the church". It was decided to issue a decree that would guarantee complete freedom of conscience. The meeting set up a commission composed of A. V. Lunacharsky, P. I. Stučka, P. A. Krasikov, M. A. Reisner and the priest M. V. Galkin. The Commission was entrusted with drafting a decree.

The Commission completed its work on the Decree late in January 1918 and presented a draft entitled "On Freedom of Conscience, Church and Religious Societies". Lenin read the draft and made some comments of fundamental importance. Considering that the freedom of conscience is impossible without separating church from state and school from church, Lenin radically changed the wording of the first clause. Having crossed out the original text of the wording, "Religion is a private affair of every citizen of the Russian Republic", suggested by the Commission, he worded this paragraph in the following way: "Church shall be separated from state."

Lenin's wording of the complete separation of church from state and school from church was a political step of immense significance. It completely met the demand of the Party Programme adopted at the 2nd Congress of the RSDLP and was identical with the wording of the first article in the corresponding decree of the Paris Commune. The profoundly democratic meaning of the Bolshevik Party's demand for separation of church from state and school from church was thoroughly explained in Lenin's writings. He thought that only complete disestablishment of church would make it possible to put into effect freedom of conscience. In accordance with the demand of the Party Pro-

gramme, Lenin changed the very title of the Decree. As suggested by the Commission, the title of the Decree coincided almost to a word with the decree "On Freedom of Conscience" issued by the Provisional Government on July 14, 1917. That decree contained only general declarations about abolition of religious and national disablements but not even a hint about separation of church from state and school from church. The Provisional Government's decree did not provide for any guarantees of real freedom of conscience. Wishing to emphasise even by the title that the proletarian state had broken off resolutely with the old policy of the overthrown classes toward religion and the church, Lenin proposed that the original title, "On Freedom of Conscience, Church and Religious Societies", should be replaced by another, "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church".

The exacting attitude to the wording while the Decree was being prepared attests to the fact that the disestablishment of church is not a purely formal act in a socialist country as it is in capitalist countries. "...Bourgeois 'freedom of conscience'," Marx pointed out, "is nothing but the toleration of all possible kinds of *religious freedom of conscience*..."<sup>1</sup> The bourgeois governments declare religious freedom and restrict the rights of unbelievers by campaigning against atheism.

The study of the draft decree shows that the Commission took into account Lenin's opinion on the attitude of the Communist Party to religion and believers. The first part of Clause 3 in the draft decree reproduced almost word for word the lines from Lenin's "Socialism and Religion" written in 1905 to explain the Party Programme adopted by the 2nd Congress of the RSDLP. The draft decree said: "Everyone must be absolutely free to profess any religion he pleases, or no religion whatever. . . . Discrimination among citizens on account of their religious convictions is wholly intolerable." Lenin altered only the last paragraph of this clause with the following note: "Even the bare mention of a citizen's religion in official documents should unquestionably be eliminated." Lenin's note is of exceptional importance. Inasmuch as a person's belief or unbelief belongs to his or her private life

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme", in: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 3, p. 29.



and is a manifestation of his/her conscience, there should be no mention of religious affiliation or non-affiliation in any official identification documents, during census and other official actions. The wording of this clause makes perfectly clear the difference between the proletarian and bourgeois concepts of freedom of conscience.

The socialist state has proclaimed freedom not only to profess any religion, to perform religious rituals and ceremonies unimpeded but also freedom of conscience for those persons who freed themselves from religious prejudices and did not profess any religion. Those citizens were granted the right to conduct scientific and educational propaganda in accordance with their convictions without hurting the religious sensibilities of believers.

Clause 4 prohibits any religious rituals and ceremonies to accompany government public functions and orders that religious symbols be removed from all the state and public institutions (schools, hospitals, railway stations, children's homes, etc.).

Lenin introduced an important correction into Clause 5 of the draft and formulated the last sentence of Clause 6 more clearly. He also edited Clause 8 to stress the incompatibility of the former ties between the church and the state in registering marriages, births and deaths.

Clauses 10 and 11 prohibit both central and local authorities from subsidising church organisations from state funds and deprive the church of the right to impose levies on the population or to take coercive or punitive measures with regard to believers.

Clause 12 deprived church organisations of the right to act as a juridical person. The socialist state thus guaranteed that henceforward no economic and financial forces could be concentrated against the interests of working people under the cover of religion.

While working on the draft, Lenin struck out Clause 13 of the Decree, which dealt with the right of church organisations to use property. Soviet power had expressed its attitude to this problem unequivocally in its very first Decree on Land, and in the decision of the RSFSR Council of People's Commissars of December 11, 1917 placing church property and buildings belonging to the former Department on Religions at the disposal of local Soviets, but the issue was still used by anti-Soviet churchmen

for their political ends. Unfortunately, Clause 13 had not been worded clearly enough in the draft. "All the estates of church and religious societies existing in Russia," the draft decree said, "shall be proclaimed national property. The procedures for inventory, maintenance and use of the buildings or articles intended specifically for divine services shall be set by decisions of local and central authorities."

Such a wording threw doubts upon the legality of the earlier decrees and decisions of the government on nationalisation of lands belonging to churches and monasteries and on forfeiture of the church's right to own property.

Lenin left only the first sentence of Clause 13 worked out by the Commission as it was and formulated its concluding part anew. "Buildings and articles," Lenin wrote, "intended specifically for the purposes of divine service shall be placed at a free disposal of appropriate religious societies by special decisions of local or central state authorities." The wording of this clause, as well as Lenin's other corrections, carry on the idea of guarantees for religious freedom.

Clauses 12 and 13 provided for the working people's complete emancipation from economic dependence on the church. The Decree deprived the church organisations of all their properties such as church buildings, lands, capitals, houses, shops and hotels. These became the property of the working people. Public prayer buildings and the church-plate required for worship were not given to clergymen, but to authorised representatives of believers, founders of the given religious society for free use.

In keeping with the Decree, 827,540 dessiatines of land, over 4,247 million roubles in cash and deposits, 84 factories, 704 hotels and town houses, 1,112 tenement houses, 277 hospitals and children's homes, 436 dairy farms and 602 stockyards were expropriated from the church and monasteries by late 1920. The expropriated land was given to peasants for their use and former monastery buildings provided housing for over 1.5 million people. Forty-eight monastery complexes were rebuilt to be used as sanatoriums and resorts, 168 facilities of this type housed social security agencies and 197 accommodated public education offices, 349 former monastery buildings were turned into hospitals and rest homes for working people.

The draft decree was discussed at a meeting of the Council of People's Commissars on January 20, 1918. Lenin chaired the meeting. After discussing the important corrections introduced by Lenin, the meeting approved the Decree. The final text of the document was first published in the press on January 23, 1918 under the title "Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR on the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church". This date is taken to be the day when the Decree was made public.

The fact that the document was entitled "Decree of the Council of People's Commissars" and signed by all People's Commissars, together with Lenin, emphasised its immense political significance. This historic document expressed the will of the people and was a great revolutionary action which legally formalised the Leninist principles of the attitude to religion, the church and believers.

*The Significance of the Decree "On the Separation  
of the Church from the State  
and the School from the Church"  
and Its Enforcement*

Associated with Lenin's name, the Decree did not simply proclaim but also provided for real, rather than formal, disestablishment of church and separation of school from church. It set forth principles of relations between the state and religious associations and became the basis for implementation in practice of the Communist Party's programme propositions concerning freedom of conscience.

The Decree played a vital role in strengthening the young Soviet state. A component part of socialist statutes, it formalised the Marxist-Leninist attitude to religion, the church, and believers and provided a classic example of how the relationship between a socialist state and the church could be resolved. The Decree not only gave believers the freedom to worship without hindrance but also provided legislation on the material, political and legal guarantees for this right to be exercised in practice.

The measures taken by the Communist Party and Soviet government, supported as they were by workers and peasants, had to be enforced during the first post-revolutionary years in the

atmosphere of bitter class struggle. The freedoms in religious matters proclaimed and guaranteed by the Decree were slanderously portrayed by defenders of the old regime as "persecution of the church". The reactionary clergy openly attacked the Decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church".

When the Decree was published, the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church issued a special appeal to believers and called on all the churches to organise public prayers and religious processions to resist enforcement of the Decree. The priests were especially indignant at losing their property rights. The text of a prayer with a provocative appeal to save the Russian Orthodox Church attached to a resolution of the Council on the Decree for the disestablishment of the church was sent by Patriarch Tikhon to all the parishes. The resolution slanderously portrayed the Decree as an action for persecution of the church.

Having lost their former privileges, the clergy of all religions in conjunction with the overthrown exploitative classes fought against workers' and peasants' power and came out in favour of restoring the bourgeois and landowners' rule. As for cries about "persecution for faith", they were designed to disguise the aims of the counter-revolutionaries.

The efforts made by the reactionary clergy to prevent the Decree from being enforced were unsuccessful. The bulk of the believers distrusted the provocative appeals of the churchmen, though the latter managed to persuade small groups of merchants, former military officers and monks from closed monasteries to participate in the processions.

The Decree was approved by ordinary believers—the result of an unprecedented growth of the working people's political involvement and their wealth of experience of the revolutions and the Civil War. As the Soviet system strengthened, the working people increasingly saw for themselves that an overwhelming majority of the clergy was openly fighting against Soviet power to restore the rule of the bourgeoisie and landowners, return the lands, factories, plants and capitals expropriated from them, and to re-establish the church's former privileges. Those of the working people who were still believers (and they were in majority during the first years of Soviet power) saw that Soviet pow-

er left all the places of worship intact, did not ban traditional church services, celebration of rituals, or religious ceremonies, and cut short any attempt to encroach upon the believers' rights.

The Decree's provisions concerning the forfeiture of the church rights to own property and act as a juridical person were of special significance. Such severe disablements had to be imposed in the first post-revolutionary years; these measures were forced on the young Soviet state by the counter-revolutionary activities of the clergy, which did not accept the loss of former privileges and often used churches and church property as forums against Soviet power.

As the clergy adopted a loyal attitude towards the Soviet system, these restrictions were considerably eased or lifted altogether. Thus, in 1945, religious associations were permitted to purchase houses for purposes of worship and as residences for the clergy. They were also allowed to buy motor vehicles. This right is formalised in the existing legislation on religious worship.

The entire Lenin's Decree, as well as subsequent laws on religious worship, were permeated with respect for those believers who had not yet freed themselves from religious prejudices. The edge of the Decree is not directed against faith and religion but against the use of religion for counter-revolutionary purposes, and the former alliance between the exploitative state and the church.

Lenin's Decree and other statutes of the Soviet state abolished the age-old privileges of the church and thus ended the alliance between the church and the state. For the first time in history, the working people were liberated from religious chains and legal guarantees for bringing about freedom of conscience were established.

In addition to dealing with Soviet citizen's freedom of conscience, the Decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church" also determined the relationship between school and church. "School shall be separated from church," the Decree said. "The teaching of religious doctrines in all the state and public, as well as private educational institutions where general subjects are taught shall not be permitted. Citizens may teach and be taught religion in private."

The Decree put an end to the church's former interference in

public education and to forcing students to study religion against their will. For the first time in history the principle of secularised school triumphed. This principle was set forth and thoroughly substantiated by Lenin together with other major revolutionary problems.

The Programme demand of the Communist Party for secularised school began to be carried out soon after the victory of the October Revolution. As early as the end of December 1917, the Council of People's Commissars made public its decision entitled "On the Transfer of Education and Instruction from the Department on Religions to the Authority of the People's Commissariat for Education". The separation of school from church was legalised by the decree of January 23, 1918. Reorganisation of public education to cleanse it of religious and clerical elements, as Marx pointed out, is the first step toward "mental emancipation of the people".<sup>1</sup>

By separating school from church, the Soviet state deprived all the church organisations of the right to use schools to propagate religious ideas and cut short the churchmen's efforts to dominate the young people's minds. The Decree proclaimed that the church could not interfere with education. The socialist state took the responsibility for children's education entirely upon itself.

The separation of school from church and the ban on organised religious instruction of children reduced dramatically the influence of religious organisations on the younger generation, thus creating conditions for educating young people in a scientific and materialist spirit. Reactionary churchmen spared no efforts to prevent Lenin's Decree from being enforced. They threatened believers with torment in the next world if they stopped religious education of their children. In violation of the Decree, schools and groups for the study of religion were set up without permission by religious societies. These attempts of churchmen were not supported by ordinary believers who became increasingly convinced of the advantages of secularised schools and understood the need for scientific education.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *On the Paris Commune*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1971, p. 139.

The Communist Party proceeded from propositions of the Programme adopted at its 8th Congress when it enforced the separation of school from church. The Programme said: "In the area of public education, the RCP undertakes to carry through what has been begun since the October Revolution of 1917 to transform school from an instrument of bourgeois rule into an instrument for total elimination of class division of society, into an instrument for communist regeneration of society." This class approach to public educational policy helped to avoid a mistaken interpretation of the principle of the separation of school from church in the early years of Soviet power. Some people came to regard the separation of school from church as a shift to non-religious education which ruled out both religious and anti-religious propaganda at school; they thought that schools should remain neutral on religion and the church. A. V. Lunacharsky and N. K. Krupskaya, who headed the People's Commissariat for Education, spoke resolutely against this mistaken interpretation of the principle of separation of school from church, and stressed that in the Soviet state public education must use all means at its disposal to dispel religious superstitions in people's minds and replace them with the light of science.

Explaining the democratic demands that school should be separated from church, N. K. Krupskaya wrote that children had to be protected against the influence of the church, against instilling notions in them, that were contrary to science, against propagation of an idea by churchmen that justice and better life cannot be attained on earth. And there the role of school and teachers was decisive.

Proceeding from Lenin's Decree, the State Commission on Education passed a resolution "On Secular School" on February 18, 1918. It recognised as inadmissible any religious instruction in state, as well as private educational establishments. Religious rituals in the schools were banned.

Mullahs, rabbis, Catholic priests and other religious preachers had had a great influence on school education in the central regions of Russia and in national republics before the October Socialist Revolution and, therefore, the Decree removed the clergy of all denominations from education. The teaching of religion at all state and private institutions was forbidden. This require-

ment was made more specific in some other documents. Thus, the Regulations Concerning the Unified Labour School of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, approved by the ARCEC in September 1918, and the resolution "On Schools of Ethnic Minorities" passed by the People's Commissariat for Education said that national schools belonged to the state and inasmuch as they were covered by all the regulations concerning the unified labour school, the clergy which had greatly influenced the national schools in the past, should be completely removed from the education of children there. It meant that all formerly oppressed ethnic groups now had the opportunity to teach their children in their native languages at secular schools completely free from clerical influence.

The idea of inadmissibility of administrative, financial, ideological or any other interference of the church in the education of the young runs through Lenin's Decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church". This basic proposition is still in effect in the existing Regulations of Secondary General Education Schools, approved by the USSR Council of Ministers on September 8, 1970. Clause 3 of the Regulations says: "Instruction and education at Soviet schools rules out any religious influence". The parents who believe in God, may teach their children religion with mutual consent but on an indispensable condition that this instruction is not in the form of group lessons and it should be conducted strictly individually.

Extremist religious fanatics even nowadays try to distort the law on the inadmissibility of organised religious instruction of minors. Such devices are used, for example, by adherents of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists, by Catholic priests and by some Adventist preachers. They misrepresent the real facts, suggesting to their co-religionists that Soviet laws on public worship do not forbid the formation of groups for children's religious instruction, and that the believers, therefore, have the right to invite priests to their homes to teach religion. The Decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church", however, says clearly that "the teaching of religious doctrines in all the state and public, as well as private educational institutions . . . shall not be permitted. Citizens may teach and be taught religion in private."



The inadmissibility of forcing minors to study religion not only follows from the principle of freedom of conscience but also reflects the humane and profoundly democratic character of socialist society. Any coercion under any pretext whatsoever is a criminal offence in the USSR. This also applies to the relationship between parents and children. Article 19 of the Fundamentals of Legislation of the USSR and the Union Republics on Marriage and the Family states that any abuse of parental rights and cruel treatment of children shall not be allowed. If children do not want to be taught religion, no one, even their own parents, can force them to do so. Otherwise, minors may protest, which would be quite legal and proper. Thus, the Council for Religious Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers once received a letter from a schoolgirl who lived in Kharkov. "I appeal to you for aid: help me to finish school," the girl wrote. "My parents—Seventh-Day Adventists—make me go to prayers with them and do not let me attend school on the days of prayer-meetings. And those meetings are almost always held three times a week. I do not have time to do my homework but I want so to study like all the rest. Please, help. . . ." This was a case of abuse of parental rights and infringement upon the child's interests and it was to be corrected immediately. The Fundamentals of Legislation of the USSR and the Union Republics on Marriage and the Family says: "Parental rights cannot be exercised against the interests of children." The interests of children mean first of all the interests of their proper upbringing. Under the law, parents who fail to carry out their duty to educate their children may be punished.

Certain extremist churchmen and sectarians grossly violate the legislation on religious worship and, to delude believers, they spread stories that the USSR violates the Convention Against Discrimination in Education adopted by the United Nations. Because the Convention was ratified by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on July 2, 1962 the Soviet government is unfairly accused of not discharging its obligations. But one has only to read this document attentively for such conjectures to be shown as groundless. Article 5 of the Convention says that "it is essential to respect the liberty of parents and, where applicable, of legal guardians, firstly to choose . . . the religious

and moral education of children in conformity with their own convictions. . . ." The document goes on to say that religious instruction should not be imposed upon any individual, or group if it is against their convictions. Soviet legislation does not prevent parents from educating their children in a religious spirit, but requires that it should be done only within the family and only by the parents themselves. The laws on worship do not prohibit children to go to church together with their parents, to attend divine services or religious ceremonies. What is prohibited is organising schools and groups to teach children religion and forcing children and teenagers to attend prayer-meetings and perform religious rites. It is not allowed to organise special prayer-meetings for children and youth.

With permission from the Council for Religious Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers, religious centres may set up theological educational institutions where young people of age may receive religious instruction. Consequently, there are no contradictions between the requirements of Soviet legislation on religious worship and the provisions of the Convention Against Discrimination in Education. They have been invented by bourgeois religious leaders and extremist churchmen and sectarians in order to deceive the faithful and encourage them to violate Soviet laws on religion and the church. The UN Convention does not say that churchmen and sectarians have the right to set up religious schools to teach children and teenagers in the USSR, but that each country's laws on religion should be observed.

Under Soviet law, parents and persons acting *in loco parentis* are responsible for their children's upbringing. Parental authority is supported and protected. School, the Pioneer and Komсомol organisations foster respect for children's elders. In conformity with the existing laws, parents have the right to place children in pre-school child-care institutions and general schools, as well as vocational schools or specialised secondary schools. They may take part in the discussion of problems relating to the teaching of their children, in extra-mural, out-of-school and health activities at the institutions which their children attend. But in cases when parents abuse their rights by their actions, the state bodies and the public cannot remain indifferent. The laws of the socialist state defend parental rights as well as children's interests.

The separation of school from church is an expression and guarantee of real freedoms given to citizens in matters of belief and unbelief. It is also intended to protect children's rights. N. K. Krupskaya wrote that a great deal was often said about parental rights and very little about children's rights. It is generally accepted that the law should protect the defenceless child in the first place.

The USSR legislation on public education formulates the responsibilities of parents and persons acting *in loco parentis*. Under the law, parents are required to bring up children to be moral and careful with socialist property, to instil good work habits and prepare them for socially useful activity. The law requires of parents and guardians to send children to school as soon as they reach school age, to ensure their regular attendance, and to prevent unexcused absences. Article 57 of the Fundamentals of Legislation of the USSR and the Union Republics on Education says: "The upbringing in the family shall be organically combined with the educational work done by educational establishments, pre-school and out-of-school institutions and social organisations."

Having given citizens freedom of choice in their personal belief and unbelief, the young Soviet state went beyond a simple declaration on freedom of conscience. Lenin's Decree stresses guarantees for freedom of conscience; it stresses that within the borders of the Soviet Republic "it is prohibited to pass any local laws or resolutions which would constrain or restrict the freedom of conscience or establish any advantages or privileges on the basis of religious denomination of citizens".

The prohibition to pass any local laws or resolutions concerning religion is still effective today. The central and local authorities see to it that citizens' unrestricted freedom to believe or not believe in God is strictly observed.

Lenin's Decree was the first in history to create political and legal conditions for the freedom to be atheist, to guarantee rights and democratic freedoms to people who do not believe in God and to provide an opportunity to conduct scientific and atheist propaganda, while maintaining a respectful attitude toward the beliefs of religious people.

The provisions of Lenin's Decree were reproduced in decrees

passed by other Soviet republics, with allowances for local conditions.

The principles underlying unrestricted freedom of conscience were formalised in the 1918 RSFSR Constitution and in the constitutions of the other Union republics, as well as later in the USSR Constitution.

But even the best decree could not make immediate changes in deep-rooted traditions, customs and rituals, in the church's age-old domination. There was a long way to go before the great democratic principles set forth in Lenin's Decree could be carried out. The Leninist policy toward religion and the church had to be implemented in practice everywhere and subordinated to the task of building a new society. The authorities had to have a correct understanding of this policy and to be taught to apply its principles in everyday life.

The profound meaning of Lenin's Decree and the essence of the policy of the Communist Party and the Soviet government were widely discussed, both verbally and in print.

Five days after publication of the Decree, the newspaper *Izvestia Sovetov Rabochikh, Soldatskikh i Krestianskikh Deputatov Goroda Moskvy i Moskovskoi Oblasti* (News of the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies of the City of Moscow and Moscow Region) printed an appeal "To All Citizens", in which the Soviet government explained the real meaning of its policy toward religion and the church. "While recognising complete freedom of religion," the Appeal said, "we do not wish the church to be a tool of state power, to be its servant. Let any believer, any community, any union of believers—let them profess any religion they want. The state cannot interfere and prescribe this or that faith."

Because of protests by hostile elements that the Decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church" was the beginning of an open crackdown on the church and believers, *Izvestia* published an article entitled "Does Our Revolution Persecute Religious Faith?" on February 20, 1918. It exposed the false thesis of the overthrown exploitative classes and anti-Soviet clergy about "persecution for faith" and, citing many examples, gave the lie to the fabrications of the counter-revolutionaries.

"...There is not a grain of truth in all this," the article said. "The revolution pursues neither religion nor faith; it cannot do this because our demand is complete religious freedom and complete freedom of conscience. The socialist revolution of workers and peasants is fighting only for the church, religion and the clergy to cease to be an instrument of state power, of enslavement and exploitation of the indigent and poor by the proprietary classes, by the rich and exploiters." The article pointed out that the malicious falsehoods about religious persecution were needed by those who had lived off the people for centuries and now that they had been deprived of millions of dessiatines of land acquired by robbery and of their vast estates, the titled landowners and landowners in cassocks alike try to incite believers against Soviet power, and had declared war on the people's government in their desire to return their lost riches.

The Central Party Committee and the Soviet government closely supervised enforcement of the Decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church". On April 9, 1918 the Council of People's Commissars instructed the People's Commissariat for Justice to form a Commission "to draw up urgent instructions on how the decree on the disestablishment of the church should be enforced". These instructions were soon prepared and published by *Izvestia*. On May 8, 1918 the People's Commissar of Justice, P. Stučka, reported to the Council of People's Commissars on the progress of the enforcement. The meeting decided to set up a special (VIII) department under the People's Commissariat for Justice to implement the Decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church". The department directed local authorities' practical implementation of measures related to the Decree. It devised and published instructions and explanations, and answered queries from state institutions and individuals on the principles of Soviet legislation on worship.

Lenin attached utmost importance to the correct implementation of the Party and Soviet government's policy toward religion. He repeatedly touched upon these problems in his reports and speeches to workers and peasants, in his conversations with representatives of the working people. Thus, speaking at a meeting in Presnya District (Moscow) on July 26, 1918, Lenin gave spe-

cial attention to explaining the Soviet state's religious policy. "Religion was a private concern. Everyone could believe in what he wants or believe in nothing. The Soviet Republic united the working people of all nations. . . . The Soviet Republic knew no religious distinctions. It stood above all religion and strove to separate religion from the Soviet state."<sup>1</sup>

In its attitude to grass-roots believers, the Communist Party has always been guided by the principle of freedom of conscience guaranteed by the Decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church" and by the Soviet Constitution. In 1919, at the height of the Civil War, a petition addressed to Lenin was received from the people of Yaganov volost in Cherepovets uyezd. They asked for permission to complete construction of a church begun before the Revolution. Lenin wrote a note to V. Bakhvalov, a representative from Yaganov, who had brought the petition to Moscow: "Completion of the church is permitted, of course; please call on the People's Commissar of Justice, comrade Kursky, whom I have telephoned, for instructions."<sup>2</sup>

The leader of the Bolshevik Party set an example of uncompromising attitude toward any religion; he held that "the idea of God *always* put to sleep and blunted the 'social feelings', replacing the living by the dead, being *always* the idea of slavery (the worst, hopeless slavery)".<sup>3</sup> As Lenin saw it, any religion is "one of the most odious things on earth".<sup>4</sup> He regarded religion as a kind of spiritual oppression and considered the economic dependence of destitute masses to be the main reason for its influence. "Religion," Lenin pointed out, "is one of the forms of spiritual oppression which everywhere weighs down heavily upon the masses of the people, overburdened by their perpetual work for

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech at a Meeting in Presnya District. July 26, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 42, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Fifth Russian edition, Vol. 50, p. 273.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "To Maxim Gorky", *Collected Works*, Vol. 35, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Leo Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 205.

others, by want and isolation.”<sup>1</sup> Lenin related emancipation from this type of spiritual oppression to abolition of exploitative society. He called upon the working people to take the side of socialism and to rally together “to fight in the present for a better life on earth”, “to win a better life for himself [the modern class-conscious worker—*Ed.*] here on earth”, and to conduct “a broad and open struggle for the elimination of economic slavery, the true source of the religious humbugging of mankind”.<sup>2</sup>

The main instrument in the struggle against religious prejudices, in Lenin’s opinion, is involving the masses in active socialist construction and raising the culture and welfare of workers and peasants. He recommended the Communists conduct patient explanatory work with believers, and he himself set an example of tact and conviction in spreading a scientific world-outlook among believers. The following fact is typical in this respect. Soon after the Decree “On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church” was published, Lenin met with peasant delegates from the interior regions of Russia. At the end of the conversation, after the main issues had been cleared up, the peasants were about to leave but stopped in the doorway. Lenin saw that the visitors seemed to be undecided, that there was a problem still left unsolved. He addressed the peasants.

“What’s the matter, comrades?” Lenin asked. “Speak up, don’t hesitate.”

“Well, we wanted to ask . . . but only don’t take it amiss!”, one of the delegates faltered. “We see, you are a good man . . . you stand up for us so . . . Why, you are our friend all over! But only they say that you don’t believe in God and never pray. Is that true?”

Lenin replied smiling:

“I’m ashamed to say that I don’t believe in God and don’t waste my time on prayers. And, what’s more, I advise you not to do it either. Sit down and I’ll explain why it is so.”

Lenin made the delegates sit down again, locked the doors

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Socialism and Religion”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 87.

so as not to be disturbed in the conversation, sat closer to the peasants and started to speak. In an hour and a half at least, the men came out of Lenin's office. They looked like different people! Their faces shone with new ideas, surprise and awe.

"Yes, we were fooled with God all right!" one of them said. "But now we've seen the light."

Lenin noted that the working masses of Russia had gone through a great school of political education in a short time during the years of the Revolution and Civil War. In August 1921 he wrote proudly: "No country in the world has done as much to liberate the masses from the influence of *priests* and *landowners* as the R.S.F.S.R. has done, and is doing."<sup>1</sup> He felt that their consciousness had radically changed in relation to religion under the impact of the Revolution. But these changes in working people's consciousness were not taken into consideration as much as they should have by those responsible for agitation and propaganda. Lenin was especially concerned about shortcomings in the organisation of atheist propaganda. He saw signs of simplification and vulgarisation in the arrangement of this important area of ideological work. Hence, it did not meet in full the workers' and peasants' requirements which had grown immensely since the Revolution.

Lenin's article "On the Significance of Militant Materialism" played a large role in organising atheist education. It criticised Party and state bodies for faults in atheist work and outlined ways to improve this work. Lenin demonstrated in detail that atheist propaganda can be expected to be successful only when it rests on a strong philosophical foundation. Lenin urged the Communists to master the art of conducting scientific and atheist propaganda, and to develop the ability to explain the source of the masses' religious faith from the materialist view. "The combating of religion cannot be confined to abstract ideological preaching, and it must not be reduced to such preaching. It must be linked up with the concrete practice of the class movement, which aims at eliminating the social roots of religion."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "A Letter to G. Myasnikov", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 505.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 405.



Lenin stressed that Marxist philosophical materialism is militant by its very nature, demanding that all modern "graduated flunkys of clericalism" and its "learned" defenders should be exposed. He called for atheist propaganda among the masses to be expanded through various forms of scientific-educational work, for the social and epistemological roots of religion to be exposed more deeply and for a scientific, materialist world-outlook to be persistently instilled in the masses. Lenin set Communists the task of tirelessly exposing idealism and clericalism and to ensure a scientific approach to organisation of atheist propaganda. He said that science was to help the masses in creating the new social system. "No forces of darkness can withstand an alliance of the scientists, the proletariat and the technologists."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin thought it very important to be able to develop a conscious attitude to religion in the most backward masses and a conscious criticism of it. And the conscious criticism of religion is, first of all, a materialist explanation of natural and social phenomena. He attached a great importance to disseminating natural scientific knowledge among the masses and highly valued the atheist writings of the eighteenth-century materialist philosophers. His basic requirement for anti-religious propaganda was that the connection between religion and the exploiting classes should be exposed more boldly and persistently. "It is particularly important to utilise books and pamphlets which contain many concrete facts and comparisons showing how the class interests and class organisations of the modern bourgeoisie are connected with the organisations of religious institutions and religious propaganda."<sup>2</sup>

Lenin's works and ideas explaining Party policy toward religion and believers and the objectives of atheist education, developed creatively in decisions of the CPSU, are great ideological weapons in the struggle for communism. They teach how to combine the struggle against religious ideology with strengthening the unity of believers and non-believers, to overcome

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech Delivered at the Second All-Russia Congress of Medical Workers. March 1, 1920", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 402.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "On the Significance of Militant Materialism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, pp. 231-32.

religious prejudices in the process of solving the problems of communist construction and to disseminate scientific knowledge among working people.

Following Lenin's behests, the CPSU resolutely opposes both a conciliatory attitude to religion and any efforts to overcome religious faiths with administrative bans.

Democracy in the Soviet way of life, real guarantees of the freedom of conscience, and economic and cultural achievements made a great impact on the political orientation of the church leaders. When the majority of believers and clergymen developed a sense of loyalty to the Soviet system, more specific Soviet legislation on worship was called for. Based on Lenin's Decree, laws and enactments were passed by all the Union republics on procedures for implementation of the decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church", instructions issued by the State Commission for Education, by the People's Commissariat for Justice, and other normative acts designed to ensure freedom of conscience were approved.

The Enactment On Religious Associations passed on April 8, 1929 by the ARCEC and the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR was one of the most important documents making a reality of Lenin's decree. It specified the demands and guarantees for observing the principle of freedom of conscience, and set special legal standards to protect religious associations of believers and ministers of religion from infringement of their lawful rights. Just as the Decree had done, the Enactment formulated the basic demands and guarantees for the separation of church from state and school from church to be realised. They covered all "churches, religious groups, religious trends and other cult associations of all denominations". These demands were intended to apply equally to all religions and religious trends, and this idea runs through the document. Believers of all denominations were granted total freedom to celebrate their rites provided the nature of faith and the celebration of rituals did not harm their health, nor offend their dignity, and the activities of the religious associations in question were within Soviet laws.

Lenin's principles made into law by the Enactment of the

ARCEC and the RSFSR Council of People's Commissars of April 8, 1929 have been and still are unshakeable. The legal standards formulated by the document are still in effect today. However, substantial changes have occurred in the structure and names of the state bodies mentioned in the Enactment since its adoption and, therefore, certain alterations and corrections were called for. On June 23, 1975 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR issued a decree "On Introduction of Changes and Additions into the Enactment of the ARCEC and the RSFSR Council of People's Commissars of April 8, 1929 'On Religious Associations'". The idea of these changes was to put in order, codify and systematise the legal standards regulating the activities of religious associations. Similar measures were adopted by all the Union republics. They do not provide for any new legal standards.

### *The USSR Constitution and Legal Status of Religious Organisations*

Leonid Brezhnev called the new USSR Constitution adopted in October 1977 a concentrated result of the path travelled by the Soviet people over the past 60 years. This outstanding document of our era is a striking manifestation of the triumph of the ideas proclaimed by the October Socialist Revolution and of successful realisation of Lenin's behests. Together with the economic and political achievements of mature socialism, with its enormous progress in spiritual development, the USSR Constitution reflects the major gains of socialist democracy and the Soviet people's broad rights and freedoms. Freedom of conscience takes a prominent place in the system of political rights and freedoms realised in the USSR Constitution.

Under the Constitution, Soviet citizens may profess any religion or none at all. The right to profess any religion is assured by equality of all religions under law and the absence of privileges for any particular denomination. Believers are free to convert to any faith. They are given the right to form religious societies and groups for public worship provided these are properly registered with the government authorities.

Religious societies are allowed only to satisfy the religious

needs of their members. They do not have the right to set up mutual aid funds or impose levies on believers.

Religious charities have nothing to do with worship and are alien to the socialist system. Soviet people have long been rid of poverty, hunger and unemployment—those incurable diseases of capitalist society. The Soviet state has taken all responsibility for social security, health and leisure of people on itself. Charity by individuals and church organisations in these conditions would offend the sense of pride and honour felt by all Soviet citizens.

Religious organisations are forbidden to organise and hold special prayer or other meetings for children, teenagers and women as well as general Bible schools, literary, needlework, trade schools and groups to teach religion. They are also not allowed to arrange sightseeing tours, to build children's playgrounds and to open libraries and reading rooms. Children and minors under the age of 18 cannot be members of religious societies. This rule is applied even to those religious associations where the canons provide for personal membership.

Believers of all denominations are allowed to worship unimpeded and to perform religious rites, provided the latter do not involve violations of public order and are not accompanied by actions that infringe on individuals' personal rights, honour and dignity. Soviet legislation on worship prohibits any coercive measures or the use of force in matters of faith.

Religious societies employ choir singers, regents and other persons serving the religious needs of believers.

Once a religious association has been registered in accordance with the established procedure, its members may gather in churches or other places of worship for public prayers without hindrance. Religious buildings and articles intended for divine service are the people's property. The state has given the buildings, religious articles and church furniture to the communities of believers free of charge. Religious associations and centres may purchase vehicles, manufacture church-plate and buy buildings for the church's needs in accordance with legal procedure.

The founders of a religious society are given a public prayer building and other property by arrangement with the appropriate district or city Soviet of People's Deputies and they are held responsible for the safety and integrity of the people's property ent-

rusted to them, as well as for maintaining order at the place of worship. Inasmuch as the public prayer buildings and other property are given over to believers, representatives of the clergy cannot be among the founders and members of the executive body of a religious association. The believers who have accepted the religious property for their use pledge to take care of it, carry out repairs, and pay for obligatory insurance. They also promise to use this property solely for their religious needs. The founders are obliged to keep an inventory which includes all new articles—donated by believers or purchased with church funds—in order to ensure safety of the property and other valuables belonging to the state. The celebration of rituals and preaching as part of divine service are done freely in houses of prayer without any interference from the state authorities, provided they are entirely religious in content and are not aimed at inciting believers against law and order by the central or local authorities.

The law stipulates the procedures for raising and spending funds by religious associations. The religious societies may open current accounts at the State Bank branches for their funds.

The associations of believers and religious centres dispose of their funds raised by voluntary contributions of parishioners at their discretion; they set the salaries and pensions of votaries of the church and appoint or dismiss religious preachers themselves without interference from government authorities.

Soviet laws provide guarantees for believers to freely celebrate religious rituals, but at the same time they establish procedures for setting up religious associations, outline the scope of their activities and their relationship with the authorities. Any religious society can begin functioning only after it has been registered with the proper state authorities, for which purpose at least 20 believers should present an application to the executive committee of their district or city Soviet of People's Deputies.

On presentation by the executive committee of a regional (territorial) Soviet of People's Deputies and by the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous republic in question, or by the Council of Ministers of the Union republic where there is no regional division, the final decision on whether to register the religious association or to prohibit it is taken by the Council for Religious

Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers. It is an all-Union body responsible for supervising observance of legislation on worship and for resolving other problems related to practical realization of the Soviet state's policy toward religion and the church.

The believers elect executive bodies of their religious society from among themselves to manage its affairs, its property and funds. Such bodies comprise three members in a religious society and one member in a group of believers. An auditing commission can be elected to check the expenditures if the believers so desire. The elected bodies and persons are accountable to a general meeting of the believers.

While no special permission from the authorities is required for divine services and celebration of rituals, any meeting of the members of a religious society or a group of believers to discuss economic and financial matters or management of religious property has to be permitted by the executive committee of the appropriate district or city Soviet of People's Deputies. Just as any divine service, the business meetings of the believers are held openly and all matters are settled by open ballot.

All the economic and financial needs of the religious association are met by voluntary contributions from believers and by fees from ceremonies. No levies or taxation for the benefit of religious societies or clergymen are permitted. No feature of any faith can justify collection of levies from members of the religious societies. The collection of so-called tithe practised by some societies of Seventh-Day Adventists in the past and the levies sometimes imposed in certain Moslem communities are against the law. Such levies are imposed, as a rule, in the interests of personal enrichment of the fanatic clergy and church activists and for missionary and charity activities rather than to satisfy the community's real needs. But the law stipulates the procedure for raising and spending funds by religious societies. Money may be collected only to pay for maintenance of public prayer buildings and to pay the salaries of the religious association's executive bodies and clergymen.

To celebrate divine service and rituals, the believers invite or elect priests, ministers or religious preachers whose work is limited to the place of worship and residence of members of the given religious association registered by the authorities. The cler-

gymen perform rites and other ceremonies of worship as required by their faith. They have no right to interfere in the religious association's management and financial or economic activities.

With the permission of proper state authorities, the religious associations may convene their congresses or conferences to elect their religious centres and governing bodies. These are maintained by voluntary payments from the communities of believers. All major denominations functioning in the USSR have such centres and governing bodies. The Russian Orthodox Church, for example, is headed by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and by the Holy Synod, a collective body under his auspices. The Patriarch may convene a council of members of higher orders of clergy (bishops, archbishops and metropolitans) and a Local Council to discuss and settle the most important church matters. He maintains ties with the heads of autocephalous churches, directs the canonical activities of religious associations and confers titles and decorations upon priests. Religious educational institutions and other establishments are under his authority.

The Russian Orthodox Church is divided into 76 dioceses headed by 13 metropolitans, 27 archbishops and 35 bishops. The dioceses are divided into *blagochinic* districts (deaneries) headed by deans. The deans control parish priests. Many parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in other countries are also under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. There are such parishes in France, the United States, West Germany, Great Britain, Argentina, Canada and other countries. Exarchates, dioceses, deaneries and missions have been set up to govern these parishes.

Four independent centres govern Moslem religious affairs in the USSR. Thus, the Moslem Religious Board for Central Asia and Kazakhstan directs religious life of Moslems living in Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Turkmenia, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. The Board has its seat in Tashkent.

The Moslem Religious Board for Transcaucasia is in charge of religious affairs of the Sunnite and Shiite Moslems residing in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. Baku is the seat of this Board.

The Moslem Religious Board for the European Part of the USSR and Siberia controls religious life of Moslems in the European part of the USSR, except the Northern Caucasus and

Daghestan, and in Siberia. The Board is situated in the city of Ufa.

The Moslem Religious Board for the Northern Caucasus and Daghestan is located in the city of Makhachkala. The structures and jurisdictions of the Boards of Moslems are defined by the regulations and rules of their internal organisation, which are devised by theologians to be approved by Congresses of representatives from Moslem associations. The Congresses are the highest ecclesiastical bodies of believers' associations in Moslem religion. As specified by their Regulations, the Boards of Moslems resolve issues of religion and dogma related to the creed and procedures for prayers. The decisions of the Boards on these issues are made known to the believers.

The life of practising Buddhists residing mainly in the Buryat Autonomous Republic, Tuva Autonomous Republic and in the Irkutsk and Chita regions of the Russian Federation is governed by the Central Buddhist Board elected by a congress of representatives of Buddhists and lamas. The residence of the head of Buddhists is located in the vicinity of Ulan Ude. The Central Buddhist Board and its Chairman confer holy orders, admit priests or monks into the lamahood and see to it that the lamas keep religious vows and observe religious rules.

Adherents of the Armenian Gregorian Church living both inside and outside of the USSR are united religiously by the Church of Armenia. Some of its communities combined into dioceses are located in foreign countries where Armenians had emigrated from Russia before the Revolution to escape from harassment and bloody pogroms launched repeatedly by Turkish invaders. The Armenian Church is headed by the Supreme Patriarch—Catholicos of All Armenians. He has his residence in Echmiadzin, an ancient church centre of Armenia, near Yerevan, the capital of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic.

The Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists has Rules of its own. They set forth the fundamentals of the creed, tasks and goals of the Union and the jurisdiction of its governing bodies. The highest authority of the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists is the All-Union Congress of representatives of its churches. The Congress elects the All-Union Council to manage religious life of the communities.



Parishes of the Roman Catholic Church, that exist in 10 of the 15 Union Republics of the USSR, are combined under separate religious boards called curias. In the Lithuanian SSR, for instance, Catholic parishes are governed by 6 religious centres: the Vilnius archdiocese and the dioceses of Panevėžys, Telšiai, Kaunas, Kaišiadoris and Vilkauskis. The Riga archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church controls the Catholic parishes in the Latvian SSR. There is a Vicariate of the Roman Catholic Church in the Transcarpathian region of the Ukrainian SSR (the city of Uzhgorod).

The curias direct church life of the parishes, appoint and transfer priests, etc. The heads of the curias appointed by Vatican perform regularly canonical visits to the parishes to supervise their activities.

There are three independent Lutheran religious centres (Augsburg denomination) functioning in the Soviet Union. Called consistories, these centres are headed by archbishops in Estonia and Latvia. The third consistory is headed by the President. The heads of the consistories are elected by General Synods—conferences of ministers and laymen, which are periodically convened.

The religious associations of Methodists residing mainly in the Estonian SSR, form the Council of the Church which elects the Superintendent of the Methodist Church.

Persecuted in pre-revolutionary Russia, Old Believers were given full freedom to celebrate their religious rites under the Soviet government. The Old-Believer parishes are divided into three separate denominations. They include the Old-Believer Church of the Belaya Krinitsa Concord. It has parishes in many republics and regions of the USSR and is separate from the Old-Believer Church of the Fugitive-Priests Concord, i.e. the church which accepts priests converted from the Greek Orthodox Church.

The Lithuanian SSR and some districts of the RSFSR have parishes of Priestless Old-Believers who do not recognise the church hierarchy. These do not have any single centre of management. Religious communities of this denomination are controlled by the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council in the Lithuanian SSR. But they are autonomous in other republics and regions.

All the religious centres maintain ties with kindred religious associations in other countries, carry on correspondence with

them, send delegates to their congresses, conventions and conferences and invite foreign guests to their own events.

State authorities do not interfere in church management, giving the communities and groups of believers a free hand in the choice of their church hierarchy. Any group of believers can proclaim itself an autonomous church community.

As ensues from the demands of the law, religious ceremonies, rituals and prayers can be performed, as a rule, only in churches, mosques, synagogues and other houses of prayer. The legislation on worship does not prohibit believers to invite priests home to perform certain ceremonies, but they must have the permission of the executive committee of a local Soviet. A religious society also needs permission of the executive committee of the Soviet in whose territory it is situated for religious processions and ceremonies outside their public-prayer buildings. The only exceptions are such religious processions around church buildings which are an integral part of divine service, as are religious rituals in the apartments or houses of believers performed on the request of the dying or gravely ill and religious rites at cemeteries or crematoria.

The prohibition of collective prayers and religious processions in the open is based on the fact that an overwhelming majority of people in the USSR are unbelievers. Therefore, it is only natural that religious ceremonies would have disrupted normal life and constrained the freedom of conscience of most of the population had they been performed outside prayer buildings. In the USSR, the law protects the rights of believers to freely worship in the prayer houses of any denomination, and those of atheists. The law protects unbelievers from forcible interference by church organisations in their lives.

The absolute majority of the believers and priests enjoying freedom of worship approve of Soviet policy on religion and the church and strictly observe legal requirements concerning religion and the church, being fully aware of their civic duty. However, there are certain religious zealots and groups of believers who try to perform anti-social, illegal actions under religious guise. They incite their co-religionists to evade their civil obligations and to perform rites that damage their health.

The Soviet state cannot be indifferent to any actions directed

against the Soviet way of life which encroach upon people's rights, honour and dignity, even if under religious cover. The socialist state protects its citizens' interests. This is the reason why it bans certain sects which grossly violate the accepted rules of social intercourse or perform cruel ceremonies. Such associations include Jehovah's Witnesses, groups of Truly Orthodox Christians, Reform Adventists and Murashkov followers, among others. Under the guise of religious rites, the leaders of these associations instigate their members to anti-social actions, and encroach upon people's personal and human rights, sometimes even commit criminal acts.

The leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, receive slanderous publications full of malicious lies about the USSR and other socialist countries from abroad through reactionary anti-Soviet centres and try to spread them among their believers. They call the socialist system "the devil's tool" and "the world of Satan", and threaten atheists and believers with annihilation in a "holy war" (Armageddon). These fanatic sectarians urge their co-religionists to evade civic obligations, refuse to vote in elections, or to participate in censuses under threat of "punishment from God". Some Jehovah's Witnesses prevent their children from attending school, forbid them to go to the cinema, to watch television and to read fiction, newspapers and magazines. Secretly gathering for collective prayers, members of another anti-social sect, so-called Truly Orthodox Christians, urge their members to refuse to work at factories, on collective farms, or in offices and try to inculcate hostility to socially useful labour. It is understandable that such activities by religious zealots are banned in the USSR.

At the same time, one cannot but notice that a process of differentiation takes place under the impact of Soviet reality even in these sectarian groups led by anti-social elements. Many rank-and-file adherents refuse to take part in cruel rites, show loyalty to the state and express their willingness to observe legislation on worship. The state authorities are considerate to these changes in the formerly banned sects and support those groups of believers who agree to worship in keeping with the existing laws. Such positive shifts are known to occur, for example, in the activities of some Pentecostal groups. In the regions of Odessa, Lvov,

Brest, Dnepropetrovsk, Chernovtsi, Rovno and some others, the Pentecostals brought their activities in line with the law and gave up cruel rites. They joined registered societies of Evangelical Christian Baptists and some have been registered by authorities on their own.

While giving believers extensive opportunities to practise their religion and granting them the right to form religious societies, Soviet law prohibits religious organisations and individuals from using meetings of believers for political actions directed against the interests of Soviet society. It is also forbidden to incite believers to evade their civic duties, not to participate in life of the state and society, and to perform cruel rites.

If, under pretext of preaching a religion, a group is set up to perform activities which are socially dangerous or which inflict damage on people's health or in any other way encroach upon people's rights or incite people to give up public activity or to evade their civic obligations such illegal actions are liable for punishment under Article 227 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR and under appropriate articles of the criminal codes of the other Union republics as is the leadership of such a group or involvement of minors into it. The law specifies severe sentences for these crimes.

Soviet legislation protects citizens' legal rights while guaranteeing freedom of conscience. Those who violate the law are to be punished. There never has been a case in Soviet court practice when a person was brought to trial for adherence to any faith or professing religion. Sanctions under criminal law or administrative reprimands are not imposed in connection with professing any faith, but on the persons who commit specific criminal acts under cover of religion.

The enemies of socialism try to represent Soviet society's well-grounded and universally accepted regulations to restrict anarchic self-will as an example of violation of civil rights and constraint of freedom of conscience. Typical in this respect is a campaign launched recently in defence of Vins, a preacher. Having received higher education at the expense of the Soviet state, Vins had not worked for more than 10 years and lived as a parasite, deceiving and illegally collecting money from believers and dodging taxes on the unearned income. Vins turned down repeated requests

from the local authorities to get a job and to lead an honourable, dignified way of life. After many warnings, the people's court of law decided to force him to seek employment in his field of training. But the job of an engineer in a factory laboratory proved to be burdensome for this young and healthy sectarian preacher, so he soon quit and tried to hide from justice. In early 1975, the case of Vins as a gross violator of Soviet law was put on open trial at the Kiev people's court. He was proven guilty by the court and he was convicted for criminal actions that had nothing to do with his religious beliefs. The bourgeois press tried to use the Vins conviction to show that believers are persecuted and freedom of conscience violated in the USSR. Curiously, this unseemly and slanderous campaign was supported by official circles in the USA. US Congress even adopted a special resolution portraying Vins as a victim of persecution and repression for his faith. These actions by the US ruling circles were bound to arouse the Soviet people's indignation. The arrogant claims by American Congress were condemned by both atheists and believers. A plenum of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists issued an official statement pointing out that the mercy displayed by the US Congressmen should have been shown not to the criminal Vins but to the innocent victims of American justice: the Rev. Ben Chavis, the civil rights fighters Assata Shakur and John Harris, the Wilmington Ten.

Atheists and believers alike enjoy the same rights and have the same duties to their socialist homeland, the USSR. Soviet laws and the rules of the socialist community preclude persecution for religious convictions, as well as offence to their religious beliefs.

The decisions of the 25th and 26th congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the USSR Constitution have further developed socialist democracy and perfected the political system of advanced socialist society. These documents lay a great emphasis on further strengthening socialist legality and law and order. Protecting the interests of society as a whole and of every Soviet citizen, the state guards socialist principles and establishes strong guarantees to protect the individual's rights and dignity. While providing broad opportunities for believers to worship, the laws of the socialist state recognise any interfer-

ence of church organisations in affairs of the state as utterly intolerable.

The Soviet Constitution and other statutes formulate the demands that any Soviet man considers his duty to meet. "Respect for legality and for the law must become part and parcel of the make-up of every person,"<sup>1</sup> said Leonid Brezhnev. Any attempts to deviate from the law or disregard its demands, whatever the motives, cannot be tolerated. And violation of legislation on worship is also incompatible with the principles of socialist democracy. Nobody in the Soviet Union can refuse to do his civic duty or instigate others to neglect theirs under cover of his religious convictions. Every Soviet citizen, whether he believes in God or not, must obey the laws of the state, honourably carry out his social duty, and respect the rules of socialist community.

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<sup>1</sup> *24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. March 30-April 9, 1971. Documents*, Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow, 1971, p. 97.

## CHAPTER 3

### GUARANTEES OF FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE IN THE USSR

In his speech at the 25th Congress of the CPSU, Leonid Brezhnev said that socialism "assures working people freedom, truly democratic rights, well-being, the broadest possible access to knowledge, and a firm sense of security."<sup>1</sup> Socialism has done away forever with the hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy, where men of labour are virtually deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the rights and freedoms which the bourgeoisie takes such pains to publicise. The USSR has real, instead of formal, democracy, ensuring freedom from exploitation and guaranteeing the right to work, to education, to free medical service, to housing and many other benefits. In contrast to bourgeois society where all the freedoms and privileges are only for the ruling classes, socialist democracy guarantees for everyone freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, and of conscience, inviolability of the person and home, freedom to choose one's trade or profession, and to develop abilities for society's benefit and in the interests of the individual. These rights and freedoms are recorded in the USSR Constitution, which also defines their specific guarantees.

Along with other democratic rights and freedoms, the Soviet people enjoy freedom of conscience. This right was formalised by the first Constitution of the RSFSR and by the constitutions of other Union republics adopted in Lenin's lifetime, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> L. I. Brezhnev, *Report of the CPSU Central Committee and the Immediate Tasks of the Party in Home and Foreign Policy*, Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow, 1976, p. 17.

by the Fundamental Laws of the USSR enacted in 1924 and 1936 and by the constitutions of the Union republics as an inherent feature of the Soviet way of life. Having proclaimed freedom of conscience, the Soviet state guarantees genuine opportunities to enjoy this right for all its citizens.

The latest Soviet Constitution preserves continuity from the previous constitutions; it substantiates deeply and thoroughly Lenin's propositions and behests on matters related to religion and the church. It has proclaimed that the society of developed socialism assures its members freedom of conscience and formalised the equality of rights and freedoms of Soviet citizens irrespective of their attitude to religion and prohibited incitement of hostility and hatred motivated by religion. "Citizens of the USSR", states Article 52 of the USSR Constitution, "are guaranteed freedom of conscience, that is, the right to profess or not to profess any religion, and to conduct religious worship or atheist propaganda. Incitement of hostility or hatred on religious grounds is prohibited.

"In the USSR, the church is separated from the state, and the school from the church."

This separation has created the conditions for complete freedom in matters of belief and unbelief. Under the Soviet Constitution, all citizens may profess or not profess any religion. The right to profess any religion is assured by the equality of all religions under the law and the absence of preferential treatment of any creed. No discrimination is permitted against any religion or its believers, nor are any advantages or exceptions provided for any faith or its adherents.

Legal, national and social equality is a great gain of the Soviet people and it demonstrates to all the oppressed peoples that only a socialist revolution can eliminate national and religious strife and provide equal rights for all citizens regardless of their nationality or religion.

The equality of religions under the law and the consistent realisation of the freedom of conscience in the USSR made the former national and religious hostility and distrust, stirred up by the exploiting classes for centuries, into things of the past. The prohibition of incitement of hostility and hatred on religious grounds has legally formalised the great accomplishments of the Soviet



state in national relations. At the same time, this provision warns against trying to instigate believers to violate socialist law or to foment enmity toward unbelievers or adherents of other creeds under the guise of religion as well as those who are disrespectful toward believers.

The provisions of Article 52 of the USSR Constitution is permeated with concern for protecting the rights of Soviet people, believers and unbelievers alike. And the exercise of their rights by Soviet citizens is inseparable from their civil duties, because under Article 39 and Article 59 the enjoyment of rights and freedoms must not be to the detriment of other citizens' interests.

Some capitalist countries also have laws that formally declare freedom of conscience and even disestablishment of the church. But the declaration of freedom of conscience does not mean that this democratic principle is being put into practice.

The founders of Marxism-Leninism exposed the bourgeois law stressing that the bourgeois conception of freedom of conscience is formal and declarative. They pointed out that the principle of freedom of conscience proclaimed by the bourgeoisie was, in fact, only tolerance for religious freedom because the church remained a part of the state machinery *de facto* and sometimes even *de jure*. Any bourgeois state regards freedom of conscience as freedom of religious worship and thus hinders the spread of atheism and discriminates against unbelievers.

Having proclaimed freedom of conscience, the Soviet state assures all its citizens of the opportunity of using this right unimpeded. All Soviet citizens enjoy all rights and democratic freedoms regardless of their attitude to religion. Believers and atheists alike are granted the same rights and have the same obligations; they are equal builders of the new society.

These provisions are formalised, in addition to Article 52, by many other articles of the USSR Constitution and the constitutions of the Union republics. "All power in the USSR belongs to the people," states Article 2. Article 34 emphasises that "citizens of the USSR are equal before the law, without distinction of origin, social or property status, race or nationality, sex, education, language, attitude to religion, type and nature of occupation, domicile, or other status." The Soviet citizens' equality in all spheres of economic, cultural and public life, regardless of their nation-

ality, race and attitude to religion is an immutable law. Any restrictions of these rights, whether directly or indirectly, is punishable by law under the Soviet Constitution. One's attitude to religion cannot be an obstacle to a citizen joining a cooperative or trade-union organisation. All religious and non-religious persons have full socio-economic, political and personal rights and freedoms. "(Art. 39) All citizens of the USSR who have reached the age of 18 shall have the right to vote and to be elected," Article 96 of the USSR Constitution declares.

Believers enjoy all civil rights and benefits in the USSR on an equal footing with atheists, and any constraint of these rights due to a person's religious faith is punishable under existing legislation. Soviet laws provide guarantees for people to satisfy their religious needs quite freely. Soviet legislation stipulate criminal sanctions for any restrictions of religious freedom. Any discrimination against believers or mental coercion is absolutely forbidden. "Prevention of the performance of religious rites, inasmuch as they do not disturb public order and are not accompanied with encroachment upon the citizens' rights, shall be punished by corrective labour for up to 6 months or by public reprimand," states Article 143 of the RSFSR Criminal Code. Criminal codes of all the other Union republics have similar provisions.

The USSR legislation also provides for other legal guarantees to ensure freedom in religious matters. For example, denial of employment or of enrolment in an educational institution, dismissal from employment or expulsion from an educational institution, deprivation of any established benefits and advantages, as well as any other discrimination because of a person's attitude to religion are criminal offences.

The Soviet state provides believers with exceptionally favourable material conditions for free worship.

In keeping with the Constitution and existing Soviet laws, believers have the right to associate for public worship, to form religious associations, to open houses of prayer with formal permission from the authorities and to elect, appoint, and employ priests. Religious associations and their religious centres are granted the right to publish religious literature and to produce articles for religious rituals.

Free to satisfy their religious needs, believers of different denom-

inations in the USSR have set up their religious communities and ecclesiastical centres. The state has placed churches, mosques, synagogues, and houses of prayer at their disposal free of charge and without time-limit, thus providing material guarantees for freedom of worship.

Existing legislation in the USSR provides for especially great care to be taken when deciding whether activities of a religious association should be terminated or a particular place of worship closed down.

In order to preclude any misunderstanding or abuse, the law stipulates that the final decision on cancelling registration of a religious society or closing an institution of worship rests with the Council for Religious Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers. Local authorities can only lodge a well-grounded petition for cancelling registration, closure of a public prayer building or termination of the contract with the religious societies which violate the laws on worship.

In speaking about material guarantees for freedom of conscience, it is necessary to point out the utter groundlessness of the slanderous fabrications spread abroad that the believers in the USSR are given only small, decrepit churches. It does not take much looking into the real position of the church in the USSR to see the malicious nature of such assertions. Believers have been given for free use, for example, the Cathedral of the Alexander Nevsky Lavra in Leningrad and the Cathedral of the Assumption in Vladimir built over 800 years ago, a remarkable example of ancient Russian architecture. They also use another architectural and historical monuments of Russia, the Troitse-Sergiyev Lavra, as well as St. Vladimir Cathedral in Kiev, the Cathedral of the Assumption in Smolensk, the Cathedral of the Resurrection in Eletsk, Olevsk (Olav) Church in Tallinn, St. Ann Church in Vilnius, Miri Arab Madrasa in Bukhara and many others. The religious societies who have taken over these buildings for worship are only required to observe the regulations established for registration and maintenance of such historical and artistic monuments.

The religious centres of various denominations have theological academies, seminaries, madrasas and other educational institutions to train ministers and preachers. All in all, there are 18

theological schools functioning in the USSR, including 6 Orthodox academies and seminaries, 2 Catholic seminaries, a Moslem academy and madrasa, an ieshibot, courses for Evangelical Christian Baptists, a theological seminary and academy of the Armenian Gregorian Church, a seminary of the Georgian Church, a divinity institute and theological courses for Lutherans.

Religious organisations are provided with other material guarantees in the USSR. The state provides printing-houses and supplies paper for publication of liturgical literature. All raw materials required to make articles of worship, utensils, candles, and matzos are supplied from state stocks according to plans. The religious associations and clergymen are maintained with money contributed voluntarily by believers. Income of churches and religious societies are not taxed.

The freedom granted to religious organisations by the socialist state is also made real by the fact that the authorities do not interfere in the interior canonical activities of the church. In keeping with existing church regulations and rules, the believers and their spiritual preceptors themselves establish the procedures for divine service, celebration of rites and other ceremonies of worship. Interpretation of prayer-books and other statutes of faith as well as church management are entirely under the jurisdiction of supreme ecclesiastical centres and hierarchs esteemed by believers. All this attests to the complete freedom enjoyed by believers to worship, and exposes the slanderous fabrications of modern anti-Communists about the alleged absence of freedom of conscience and "persecution" of believers in the USSR.

Bourgeois religious scholars, such as Walter Kolarz, Nikita Struve and Michael Bourdeaux, spread falsehoods about the position of church and believers in the USSR, but deliberately keep silence about the gross abuse of freedom of conscience in the capitalist countries and the state's unceremonious interference in church affairs. Kolarz and Bourdeaux are well aware, of course, that in their own country—Great Britain—even the Church of England, which is under the patronage of the ruling classes and monarchy, has no right to settle purely internal matters and to introduce any changes into worship and liturgy on its own authority. All the decisions of its General Synod have to be endorsed by Parliament and the Queen. The canons of the

Church of England are based on prescriptions contained in the Book of Common Prayer, which has not been changed since 1662. The Church authorities attempted somewhat to change the content of their prayer-book before the War. A draft of a new prayer-book was approved by a majority at the Church Assembly, but was rejected in Parliament by a majority vote when it was presented for endorsement in compliance with English law. Thus, the secular Parliament decided the fate of a purely ceremonial matter of the Church of England. What is the point of talking about guarantees for freedom of conscience, freedom of worship and celebration of rituals after this?

In contrast to the false declarations of bourgeois democracy, Soviet democracy guarantees both religious freedom and the right not to profess any religion. The real democracy of the socialist system is also manifested by the fact that the authorities everywhere see to it that Soviet legislation is strictly observed and require that ordinary people, as well as local and central officials obey the law to a letter. The arrangements made to supervise observance of the legislation on public worship in practice are a convincing example of the guarantees provided for freedom of conscience in the USSR.

But one thing is worth noting before dwelling on how this supervision is carried out. The constitutional guarantees for freedom of conscience in the USSR do not mean that religious societies or groups and their leaders can do whatever they like. The Communist Party and Soviet government treat believers with patience, meet them halfway and create the conditions necessary for worship. At the same time, the Soviet law establishes certain limits to the activities of religious associations. These must be restricted to satisfying the religious needs of the believers. No church activities, other than those directly connected with worship, is permitted in the Soviet Union.

Supervision of observance of laws on religion and the church is a responsibility of central as well as local state authorities. In order to carry out the Leninist policy towards religion and the church and to ensure that the state is in control of enforcement of the legislation on religious worship, the Decrees of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, and decisions and orders of the Soviet government concerning protection of peo-

ple's constitutional rights to freedom of conscience, there is a government body functioning now for the whole of the Soviet Union—the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR. This Council sees to it that legislation on worship is observed by religious associations and priests and takes measures to correct any violations. The Council makes sure that the religious associations and priests conduct divine services and perform rites within the limits of the law and do not encroach on citizens' rights or disturb public order. It protects both the atheistic convictions of the majority of Soviet people, who have broken with religion, and the constitutional rights of those persons who still believe in God.

The Council for Religious Affairs introduces drafts of new laws and of other statutes, which become necessary due to changes in the position or activities of religious organisations, to the Soviet government. Proceeding from and obeying Soviet laws, Decrees of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, decisions and orders of the USSR Council of Ministers, the Council for Religious Affairs deals with the application and execution of laws and decisions on religion throughout the Soviet Union. The Council helps religious centres and associations in maintaining international contacts, in their participation in the peace movement and in strengthening friendship among nations.

The Council has its representatives in the Union and Autonomous republics and in the territories and regions. Their function is to strengthen socialist legality so that the laws on worship are strictly observed. The representatives check whether the legislation is correctly enforced and observed locally and take measures to correct violations, acting together with local officials.

An important part in supervising the accurate, strict and timely execution of laws on worship is played by the governments of Union and Autonomous republics. They direct the work of local Soviets to assure citizens' constitutional right to freedom of conscience. The importance of the local authorities in supervising execution of legislation on worship has grown considerably over the last few years. Important legal instruments adopted by the governments of Union republics and All-Union statutes in-

tended to increase efficient supervision of the laws on religion and the church contributed greatly to this.

The Standard Regulations of the Rural (Settlement) Soviet of Working People's Deputies approved by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in 1968, the Standard Regulations of the District Soviet of Working People's Deputies (1971) and the Standard Regulations of the City and City's District Soviet of Working People's Deputies (1971) all contain special clauses obliging the local authorities to implement Article 52 of the Soviet Constitution and to see to it that the right of believers to practise their religion and the right of atheists to conduct atheistic propaganda without hindrance are realised.

Under existing legislation, the executive committees of local Soviets record all religious organisations in their respective Soviets. They keep an inventory of the church buildings and other property used for public worship and owned by the state, check that they are in good condition, see to it that the communities of believers and the clergy observe Soviet laws on religion and the church, and explain Soviet legislation on religious worship to the public.

The executive committees of City and District Soviets of Working People's Deputies consider petitions of believers requesting permission to open a public prayer building, adopt resolutions on the petitions, and forward their decisions to superior authorities. After the superior authorities and the Council for Religious Affairs have agreed to register the religious association in question, the executive committee of the local Soviet concludes an agreement with the founders of that religious association on placing the building of worship and church-plate at the disposal of the believers free of charge or an agreement with an authorised representative of the believers granting the right to rent a place for public prayers.

In accordance with the established procedure, the Soviet of a village, settlement, district, city, region or territory may come forward with a proposal that a particular religious association be withdrawn from the registration list and its public prayer building be closed down if that association violates laws on religious worship and does not fulfil the agreement on the safety of the

building and other property given by the state to believers for free use.

For a more profound study of the observance of the state laws on religion and the church and to exercise day-to-day control over execution of the laws on public worship, the executive committees of district, city and some rural Soviets set up voluntary commissions to assist in supervising observance of legislation on worship. Deputies of the local Soviets with knowledge in this area, officials of finance bodies, lawyers, representatives of public education authorities and other activists of the local Soviets are usually invited to participate in such a commission.

The commissions are set up on a voluntary basis and are guided in their work by Soviet laws and the laws of the appropriate Union republic. The commissions help the executive committees of local Soviets to realise the constitutional right of citizens to freedom of worship and freedom of atheistic propaganda. Their main concern is to ensure freedom of conscience, guaranteed by the USSR Constitution, for all citizens. They exercise regular control to make sure that nobody interferes in the liturgical activities of the religious associations and houses of prayer of all the denominations registered by the authorities in accordance with the laws and that the believers can gather for divine services, celebrate rites and perform other religious ceremonies without hindrance. The commissions see to it that religious associations' activities do not go beyond the limits set by Soviet legislature, and that the clergy, active members of the church and leaders of the sectarian communities do not conduct religious propaganda outside the prayer houses. The commissions make sure that both parents agree, as required by law, to baptise their children. Relying on the commissions, local authorities can supervise observance of the laws on worship without permitting any highhanded actions and without offending believers' religious sensibilities.

When instructed by the appropriate executive committees of the district (city) Soviets, the commissions inspect the buildings and property used for worship to see if they are in good condition, check on how the legislation on worship is observed and assist the executive committees of Soviets in taking timely and correct action on complaints about violations of the legisla-



tion on worship. The commissions have no administrative authority and act in accordance with regulations approved by the executive committees of Soviets in administrative regions and territories.

The voluntary commissions can submit proposals to the executive committees of Soviets in villages, settlements, districts or cities on how to deal with any violations of the laws on religious worship and the persons responsible for them.

Sometimes such voluntary commissions are set up by regional Soviets of People's Deputies, as is the case in Moscow, Saratov and some other regions. The Executive Committee of the Bryansk Regional Soviet set up a voluntary council to coordinate supervisory activities carried out by various offices, agencies and public organisations.

Many voluntary commissions have accumulated a great deal of valuable experience in their everyday work for the last few years; the executive committees of the territorial and regional Soviets of People's Deputies and the Councils of Ministers of Autonomous and Union republics give increasingly close attention to promoting the activities of these commissions.

The supervisory commission on observance of religious legislation under the Zyryanovsk City Soviet in Eastern Kazakhstan Region is especially interesting. Its members regularly meet with religious leaders, discuss the laws on public worship with them, and see to it that the believers and local officials do not violate the law on the separation of church from state and school from church. The commission focuses on ensuring that freedom of conscience is observed everywhere and that Soviet laws on worship are observed by religious associations and clergy, as well as by local authorities. Activists deliver lectures at meetings of the staff of local Soviets and at workers' meetings, explaining basic provisions of the Soviet legislation on worship, and publish articles on the subject in the local press.

Much has been done by the executive committees of local Soviets in Azerbaijan. Together with the local supervisory commissions, they updated the lists of functioning religious organisations in all districts and found preachers of unregistered religious groups. Many of them have long deceived believers and violated Soviet law with impunity. As a result, measures were taken to

stop the activities of such religious groups and of the unregistered preachers. Supervision of observance of the legislation on religious worship by registered religious associations was increased and illegal levies on believers were ended.

The supervisory commissions on observance of religious legislation set up under the auspices of the executive committees of the city and district Soviets in the Ukraine, Moldavia, Byelorussia, Uzbekistan and Estonia, and in the regions of Smolensk, Novosibirsk, Yaroslavl and other cities of the RSFSR carry on a great deal of explanatory work, meeting priests and believers as well as officials of factories, institutions and educational establishments. The activities of the commissions are an important guarantee of freedom of conscience in the Soviet Union.

## CHAPTER 4

# EVOLUTION OF RELIGIONS AND DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN THE SOVIET UNION

## EVOLUTION OF THE SOCIAL CONCEPTS OF MODERN RELIGIONS

### *The Church's Counter-Revolutionary Stance During the Early Years of Soviet Power*

The October Socialist Revolution marked the beginning of a new historical era—the triumph of socialism and communism. Working people all over the world acclaimed the victory of Russia's revolutionary proletariat. The Russian revolution frightened and angered the ruling classes throughout the world. Allied with counter-revolutionaries inside the country, the bourgeoisie of some European countries, of the USA and Japan started armed struggle against Soviet power. Religion and the church acted as strong-points of the anti-Soviet movements. The church's counter-revolutionary activities at that time ensued from the prevailing socio-economic and political conditions. The clergy had accumulated enormous wealth over the centuries, and the church's ideological influence was great. Russia was covered by a huge network of places of worship and public prayer buildings where an army of thousands of priests, monks and metropolitans worked hard to confuse the people. A great number of parish schools also served the autocracy in Russia.

The October Revolution profoundly affected the interests of Russian Orthodoxy, which was the established Church under tsarism. The clergy rightly saw the end of their age-old rule over the minds of millions of believers in the overthrow of land-owners and capitalists. The absolute majority of the clergy was against Soviet power, though the measure of their hostility was different in different echelons. The regular clergy (monks) and bishops were the most reactionary. The secular and parish clergy

was more sensitive to the mood of their parishioners, because they depended more on the believers.

The church's counter-revolutionary activity was part of a general counter-revolutionary movement. In the very first days after the victory of the Revolution, the counter-revolutionary forces made an attempt to overthrow Soviet power. Kerensky, who had fled from Petrograd, gathered Cossack detachments and moved them to the capital. They were led by General Krasnov. The so-called Committee for the Salvation of the Motherland and the Revolution, made up of Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, stirred up a counter-revolutionary rebellion of military cadets. Simultaneously, a revolt flared up in Moscow. The counter-revolutionaries tried to strangle the young republic, while it was still weak. The clergy helped them as best they could, which was shown by the activity of the Local Council, convened on the eve of the Kornilov revolt in August 1917 and continuing after the October Revolution. The Council supported the military cadets who had revolted in Moscow. When the rebels seized the Kremlin for a time, its cathedrals and bell-towers were placed at their disposal at once. But the revolt was soon suppressed. Powerless in their rage, the Council members started rumours that the Bolsheviks had treated the cadets brutally and destroyed sacred places in the Kremlin. The idea was simple: to appeal to believers' emotions and incite them against Soviet power.

The Local Council headed by Tikhon, the elected Patriarch, became the hub of the Orthodox Church in its fight against Soviet power. Tikhon appealed to the clergy and believers with an epistle slanderously attacking the October Revolution and the workers' and peasants' state. He anathematised Soviet power and called upon the believers to fight against it and resist enforcement of its decrees. He sent out a secret directive to all local priests recommending that they rally "loyal parishioners" into brotherhoods, unions, and councils and incite the population against Soviet power through them. The Patriarch and the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church responded to the decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church" with rage and hatred. The Council openly urged fighting against Soviet power in its crude appeal

entitled "To the Orthodox People". "It is better to shed one's blood and to be awarded martyr's crown than to let the enemies desecrate Orthodox faith," said the Appeal.

The hopes of the enemies of the Revolution were placed in the church due to its special position in the first post-revolutionary years. While such instruments of the old government as assemblies of the nobility in gubernias and uyezds, merchants' societies, conventions of tradesmen and industrialists, zemstvos (elective district councils) of gubernias and uyezds, and city dumas ceased to exist after the Revolution, the church preserved almost all of its old organisational forms: discipline, orderly functioning apparatus and well-trained priesthood. While the Revolution deprived the overthrown classes of their former rights to hold conventions and meetings against the interests of the people, initially, the church retained its opportunities for political demonstrations under the guise of religious processions, addressed political sermons to parishioners, appealed to them via its press and held parish meetings for the same purpose. In many cases, it used churches given over to believers by Soviet power for purposes that had nothing to do with worship. Instigated by the anti-Soviet top hierarchy, many priests continued to serve the old regime. They manipulated believers' religious feelings, spread lies about alleged persecution of the church, and tried to arouse the masses to anti-Soviet struggle under cover of "defence of religion". That was the purpose of the epistles addressed by the Council and Patriarch Tikhon to the parishioners.

The Patriarch's epistles outlined a general political course for resisting the new government and contained specific recommendations as to forms and methods of anti-Soviet activities by the clergy, as well as by laymen. There were 16 such epistles issued between 1917 and 1922 on behalf of the Council and Patriarch Tikhon.

The central and local Soviet authorities pursued a flexible, yet firm policy toward the counter-revolutionary intrigues of the clergy and Patriarch Tikhon. The authorities did not wish to make Patriarch Tikhon look like a "martyr of faith", because it could only enhance his prestige in the eyes of believers who were still politically immature. During the Civil War and the early years

of peaceful construction, when the absolute majority of the urban and rural masses unconditionally supported all the undertakings of Soviet power, the epistles of Tikhon, as well as the appeals issued by Denikin, Kolchak and Purishkevich, revealed the essence of the old feudal and landowners' ideology and of the church policy pursued by Tikhon.

The epistles of the Council and the Patriarch, filled with criticism of the Soviet government for its drastic revolutionary measures, which had deprived the landowners and capitalists of their age-old privileges, were proof enough to show whose interests the church and clergy were trying to safeguard. That was why the clergy's open stand on the side of the counter-revolutionaries failed to make the masses of believers among workers and peasants follow suit. The agitation against Soviet government under pretext of alleged persecution for faith found no support, as prayers continued unimpeded in places of worship and believers freely celebrated religious rituals everywhere.

The clergy and ecclesiastical hierarchy were particularly enraged that they had been deprived of their former privileges, of the right to acquire and accumulate capital and to dispose of the church property as they saw fit. But the absolute majority of believers welcomed these humane measures and actively supported Soviet policy. These measures met with complete understanding, first of all, among the proletarian and peasant believers. The Soviet government relied on revolutionary enthusiasm of the proletariat and peasantry in its church policy, just as in any other major undertaking.

The peasants who received the land of monasteries and landowners from the state did not support those who had taken up arms to have the old order restored, despite the appeals from the Patriarch and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, now deprived of their former privileges. The proletarian members of Orthodoxy and the absolute majority of ordinary believers of other religions and sects cruelly oppressed under tsarism also welcomed all the Soviet measures on religion and spoke up as passionate adherents of its policy.

In the first post-revolutionary years, not only priests of the Russian Orthodox Church, but also ministers of all other religions joined forces with the enemies of Soviet power. They

forgot about their former conflicts and joined efforts to regain their privileges and ideological influence on the poverty-stricken working people. The Moslem mullahs, for instance, resisted implementation of the decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church" and tried to prevent believers from registering births or marriages in registry offices. Moslem priests collaborated with Whiteguard armies during the Civil War, actively helped the *basmachi* (anti-Soviet elements in Central Asia) and in some places raised special "holy" detachments under the "green banner of the Prophet".

Anti-Soviet Old Believers fought in the "Holy Cross" detachments of the Kolchak army. Leaders of Jewish communities also actively resisted implementation of the Soviet government policy on religion and the church. In 1918, the All-Russia Congress of Judaic Religious Communities was convened in Moscow. Its delegates disagreed with the principal provisions of the decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church", and the All-Ukraine Congress of Rabbis, held in Odessa the same year, placed Soviet power under herem (anathematised). Together with bourgeois nationalists, the Jewish clericals laid claims to special privileges for the Judaic communities and put up resistance to local authorities setting up secular schools instead of kheders and ieshibots (parish schools) that were attached to synagogues.

The leaders of the Roman Catholic clergy organised a "Central Committee of the Roman Catholic Parish Councils" in Petrograd in 1918. The Committee instigated religious Catholics to boycott Soviet government measures. The Pope instructed Catholic priests in Soviet Russia to oppose implementation of the above-mentioned decree.

But the counter-revolutionary plans of the churchmen failed. The working people everywhere welcomed the decree and demanded that any attempts to take actions against its implementation should be thwarted. A group of Catholic priests headed by Archbishop Tseplyak and Prelate Butkevich were brought to trial for resisting enforcement of the decree and instigating believers to take action against Soviet power.

The reactionary forces of capitalist states launched an anti-Soviet campaign in connection with the trial of Tseplyak and

Butkevich. The sentence passed by the Soviet court was discussed by the governments of some countries and provoked a stream of lies and threats to Soviet people in the bourgeois press. There were even attempts to use the sentence as grounds for diplomatic pressure to bear on the Soviet government. Thus, on March 30, 1923 the British Trade Mission in Moscow, on behalf of the Foreign Office, demanded that the Soviet government should rescind the death sentence for Butkevich. The solicitation was rejected. It was said in the Soviet reply that Soviet Russia was a sovereign state and the British should show mercy to the peoples of Ireland, Egypt or India. Significantly, the British Trade Mission which was given the Soviet reply refused to forward it to its government. Then the reply was published by the Soviet press.

The Soviet government took a firm stand protecting its sovereignty and its people's interests. The article "The Sentence on the Catholic Priests and International Capital" published in *Pravda* stated: "Don't hope, gentlemen, that your cries will affect the decision of the Soviet government even in the slightest." The court sentence was executed.

The wish to regain their lost privileges motivated the church's top ranks to use deception in order to mobilise believers for the struggle against Soviet power. Patriarch Tikhon's epistles, his appeals with anathemas and imprecations of the new rule, the dissemination of falsehoods about religious persecution and participation of priests in anti-Soviet revolts and on the side of the Whiteguard armies were the best agitation for Soviet power *per se*. These actions made workers and peasants wonder why all religions and churches were supporting the enemies of Soviet power and why religious preachers were helping Kolchak, Denikin, Wrangel and foreign interventionists bring back the rule of capitalists and landowners.

The churchmen used various methods in their struggle against Soviet power. Money, various conjectures, falsehoods and slander were all used. The clergy attached especially great importance to spreading falsehoods. Slander and lies about organised suppression of religion poured forth from church pulpits, and in oral and written statements by counter-revolutionary churchmen and top church dignitaries in the early 1920s. They had



one goal—to incite the people against Soviet power while concealing their hostility to it under the guise of “defence of religion”. The cries about “persecution” of religion and the church, in fact, were to mask the clergy’s anti-Soviet activity. The clerical authorities later admitted that assertions about religious “persecution” by the Soviet government were false. Thus, Metropolitan Sergii, later the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, said in an interview with foreign correspondents in the early 1930s: “There is no persecution of religion in the USSR and never has been.”

*The Attempts to Starve the Soviet Republic  
to Death*

Having failed in their open struggle against Soviet power, the secular and clerical counter-revolutionaries did not abandon hope that the republic of workers and peasants would starve to death.

An unheard-of famine occurred in 34 Russian gubernias with a population of 30 million in 1921. The extraordinary measures to help the famine-stricken from state reserves were exhausted. Starvation threatened millions of people. At the same time, the church had enormous wealth. Spending even part of the church’s riches to help the starving would have been a humane action. The riches of the Orthodox Church alone would have been enough to save 100 million people from starvation.

The Council of the Orthodox Church and Tikhon himself were unanimous in their support of the rebellious military cadets who seized the Kremlin in early November 1917. There were voices at the Council urging to raise “great militia force” in support of the rebels “and to call upon everybody, young and old, to come out in defence of the Motherland” (i.e. counter-revolutionaries). In his speech at the Council, Priest Nezhintsev urged the Council to appeal to the entire Russian people, stating that the Council “gives its blessing to the churches and monasteries to give everything, including life” in order to have the lost privileges recovered. “The moment is coming,” said a speaker at the Council, “when one has to give up everything. Don’t spare anything, give all the property of the monasteries, give gold, precious stones, pearls, precious chasubles, expensive

shrines, give all" for the sake of the overthrow of Soviet power.

The wealth of the church had been accumulated for centuries at the expense of the people, by exploiting the down-trodden masses. It therefore belonged to the people by right, and the working people had the moral right to demand at a difficult moment that the wealth should be returned.

Factory and office workers proposed in 1921 that the church's wealth be used for the needs of the hungry. These well-grounded proposals were supported by the overwhelming majority of believers and by some clergymen. But many priests headed by Patriarch Tikhon opposed giving even part of the church valuables to the fund set up for the aid to the starving. Tikhon even threatened repressions against those clergymen and laymen who wanted to give away church riches.

This, then, was the situation when the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR decreed on February 26, 1922 that surplus church valuables should be expropriated in response to the people's requests. Under the decree, only part of the gold and silver articles were to be confiscated from the property placed at the disposal of believers by the state free of charge. In anticipation of difficulties with the expropriation of church valuables, the Central Committee of the Communist Party sent out a telegram on March 1922 to gubernia Party committees recommending that extensive explanatory work should be conducted amongst the population, believers in particular. Articles made of precious metals were to be taken away with caution and the clergymen were to be informed in advance of the procedure and dates for the confiscation. It was specially stipulated that the process of expropriation should not hinder public worship or hurt the interests of believers in any way.

On March 26, 1922 *Pravda* published an editorial entitled "On the Expropriation of Church Valuables". The Party Central Committee, it said, recommended that Party and government bodies should differentiate between different ranks of the clergy and try to win over those parish priests, who meet measures of the authorities with understanding, to the side of Soviet power.

Lenin attached great importance to correctly solving all the problems connected with the expropriation of valuables.

On March 12, 1922 he requested that the Party committees in the gubernias be instructed to make sure that delegates to the 11th Party Congress bring detailed information on the wealth of monasteries and churches and on the progress of the expropriation.<sup>1</sup> Reporting to the 11th Party Congress on behalf of the Central Committee, Lenin informed the delegates on the subject. The Congress approved the measures taken by the Central Committee to expropriate the valuables. "The will of the working people and an unquestionable urgent necessity," stated a Congress document, "ever more insistently call for broad assistance to be rendered to the millions of starving peasants from this rich storehouse."

About 48,000 tons of grain and other foodstuffs were bought in other countries with the funds raised by the expropriation of church valuables. A lot of money was spent on purchases of livestock and agricultural implements, on aid to children and the crippled, and for other humane purposes. The negative reaction of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to the expropriation of valuables was not accidental. The famine was an instrument of political struggle against Soviet power in the hands of the secular and ecclesiastical counter-revolutionaries. The diehard reactionary Bulgakov wrote cynically: "We and hunger are both means of political struggle."

There were other, equally important, reasons that made the church leadership sabotage the Soviet government's decision to expropriate church valuables. The church's wealth was regarded as reserves for the counter-revolutionaries. The expropriation of gold and silver articles deprived the counter-revolutionary clergy and other representatives of the overthrown classes of an opportunity to use famine to return to the old monarchical order with its lost privileges. That was why Patriarch Tikhon called upon the clergy and laymen openly to resist the measures taken by the Soviet government. In many cities the clergy succeeded in provoking religious fanatics to bloody riots against the expropriation of church valuables. Criminal proceedings were instituted against the initiators of the riots.

The trials of the participants and organisers of the resistance

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Fifth Russian edition*, Vol. 54, p. 206.

to the expropriation of church valuables revealed that Patriarch Tikhon had led and inspired the bloody riots and counter-revolutionary actions by the clergy. A considerable part of the clergy then began to openly oppose his anti-national actions. A group of church figures from Moscow, Petrograd and from the countryside visited the Patriarch's residence on May 12, 1922 in order to protest against his actions. The delegation demanded that a church council should be convened and Tikhon removed from his post. On May 14, 1922, *Izvestia* published an appeal to adherents of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Appeal, signed by prominent representatives of the clergy of Moscow, Petrograd and Saratov, called upon believers to unconditionally support all the measures of the Soviet government. Charged with anti-popular actions, Tikhon was arrested.

Tikhon's trial was a model of the humanity and fairness of Soviet justice. As the head of the church, he was to blame for the anti-Soviet actions of the clergy in the first place. His appeals to resist the "power of Antichrist" caused great loss of life. He was the first to be punished as he deserved. Although Tikhon had actively opposed Soviet power from the very beginning, he was not brought to trial until May 1922. The bourgeois press in those days bristled with malicious fabrications about the Patriarch's forthcoming trial and strove to convince readers that Soviet power was going to try him for his religious views rather than for political crimes. However, as the trial papers show, Patriarch Tikhon was tried for his counter-revolutionary activities, nothing else. "The state is trying Patriarch Tikhon as a counter-revolutionary," Metropolitan Vvedensky wrote at the time. "This is the concern of the state. It has the right to try any citizen, whatever his title, whatever his rank. . . . They are not trying him here for faith, they are trying him for deception by means of faith, for religious charlatanism."

Caught in counter-revolutionary actions, Tikhon was brought to trial as a political criminal. Some other figures of the church had been tried in the past for similar anti-popular actions, not for their belief in God, as anti-Soviet writers suggest. These facts are common knowledge and they are now recognised by prominent church authorities. *The Truth about Religion in Russia*, a book published by the Moscow Patriarchate, points out that court

trials of the clergy did take place in the early years of Soviet power, but the defendants were not tried for their faith, but "solely because they conducted anti-Soviet work, concealing their intentions with cassock and the church banner. Those were political trials that had nothing to do with the life of religious organisations or the church work of individual priests".

Finding himself completely isolated and confronted with irrefutable evidence, Tikhon was compelled to make a public statement admitting his criminal actions. On June 16, 1923 in his appeal to the Supreme Court of the RSFSR and on June 28, 1923, in his address to the believers, he publicly repented of his crimes against the people, recognised that he had been brought to trial on fair grounds, openly dissociated himself from the counter-revolutionary church and secular organisations and condemned the decisions taken by a council of the exiled clergy in Sremski Karlovci. "At the same time," Tikhon wrote, "I declare to the Supreme Court that from now on I will not be an enemy of Soviet power. I dissociate myself definitely and resolutely from both foreign and interior monarchic and Whiteguard counter-revolutionaries."

Considering Patriarch Tikhon's public repentance, the Soviet court was humane enough to stop his hearings. Tikhon was released in late June 1923.

After Tikhon had repented in public, the openly counter-revolutionary activities of the Orthodox clergy started to decline. Tikhon's will and testament made public after his death on April 7, 1925 contributed to this process. The will contained an appeal to the believers and clergy to recognise Soviet power.

### *The Beginning of the Russian Orthodox Church's Evolution*

The bulk of believers—workers and poor peasants—supported all the Soviet government's measures irrevocably. The reactionary clergymen's anti-Soviet activities met with no sympathy from believers, even in the early years of the Soviet state and increasingly isolated them as the time passed. That was the beginning of a radical change in the evolution of the Russian Orthodox Church. The logic of events started by the October Revolution and consolidation of socialism forced the church in the

USSR to begin searching for new ways to find its place in the fundamentally new social conditions, to "fit in", as it were, politically and ideologically. And this side of their activities is a characteristic feature in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as of other religions in Soviet society.

The more far-sighted churchmen could not help noticing that freedom of conscience in the USSR allowed the people who still believed in God to conduct their religious activities without hindrance. The broad democracy of the Soviet way of life and great economic and cultural progress made an immense impact on the church organisations and their representatives, who changed their political orientation. Under the circumstances, the church hierarchy was faced with the dilemma of either continuing their anti-Soviet struggle and losing support from the believers completely, or adapting to the new conditions, laying down their political weapons, and continuing to preach and tend their flock. Their switch to a new position, however, was a complex, uneven and contradictory process. The pre-revolutionary unity of church organisation in Orthodoxy, just as in many other religions, had been broken. Many newly-organised groups and trends emerged. The church entered a period of interior crisis.

Events inside the country and the intrigues of the international imperialist reactionaries compelled most of the clergy and believers to become loyal to the Soviet system. When the plan of socialist industrialisation was made public, anti-Soviet circles outside the country launched a furious campaign of lies and slander and the Pope even urged a crusade against the Soviet Union. The clergy in exile became more active. Its leaders offered a union to the Church of England in order to accelerate intervention in Russia. Whiteguards abroad also intensified their activities. The leading White emigré clergy used various channels to instigate unloyal clergymen inside the country. They urged their brothers-in-Christ to sabotage the undertakings of Soviet power, and they succeeded in some places.

Some churchmen and sectarians inside the country tried to hinder industrialisation, encouraged believers not to participate in building a new life. They hampered the sale of bonds for national industrialisation loans, the change-over to continuous production and the shock-worker movement. A convention of

Evangelists, for example, forbade their members to attend Soviet cultural centres and reading-houses. A convention of Seventh-Day Adventists proclaimed physical culture and sports to be debauchery. In order to paralyse commerce and stir up the population, churchmen hoarded small change to withdraw coins from circulation. Some clergymen did not like even the census. The Orthodox clergy started a rumour that the census day—December 17, 1926—would be the Day of Last Judgement. Moslem preachers prohibited adherents to answer the questionnaire. In the North, shamans prophesied deer plague for those who would deal with census officials.

In some places, churchmen and sectarians penetrated the government and economic bodies, public organisations, factories and offices, and did as much damage as they could. Sometimes they managed to wreck a campaign for voluntary donations in the countryside, to foil subscription to national bonds or other important measures. Some churchmen set up secret organisations for sabotage. In 1929, state security organs disclosed and neutralised a counter-revolutionary group in Leningrad composed of priests, monks, former members of nobility, and landowners, and had youth terrorist cells. The group leaders maintained contacts with their supporters in Minsk, Tomsk, Vladivostok and other cities. In Vyatka, for instance, former business owners, priests and monks discontented with Soviet power rallied around the local bishop.

The activities of some groups of churchmen and sectarians were still political. In 1929, state security organs disclosed a counter-revolutionary organisation called the Union for Liberation of the Ukraine aimed at overthrowing Soviet power. A court trial of the members of this organisation revealed that the so-called Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church headed by V. Chekhovsky, the former Prime Minister of the Petlyura government, was closely connected with The Union for Liberation of the Ukraine, whose membership included Metropolitan V. Lipkovsky and the bishops O. Yareshchenko, S. Orlik, K. Krotovich and Yu. Zhovchenko. The anti-Soviet plotters used the church as a machinery for counter-revolutionary propaganda. "We hoped," said a leader of this organisation during the trial, "that faith was not yet extinguished in the masses despite vig-

orous anti-religious propaganda and that the priests, particularly in the village, can still do much to propagate the ideas of the Union for Liberation of the Ukraine."

But the bulk of ordinary believers had no sympathy for the anti-Soviet actions of the reactionary clergy and the latter found itself increasingly isolated.

There was a split that went ever deeper among the clergy of all persuasions on their attitude towards the new social order. Many groups emerged in the parish clergy, which were in favour of unconditional recognition of Soviet power and observance of its laws. Following the sentiments of most of ordinary believers, the 5th Congress of the Seventh-Day Adventists, held in 1924 in Moscow, adopted a special declaration addressed to the All-Union Central Executive Committee whereby the leaders of the sect formally recognised Soviet power and expressed their willingness to adhere to its laws.

An All-Russia Convention of Moslem Clergy took place at Ufa in October 1926. The delegates unanimously supported the Soviet government's domestic and foreign policies. Their telegramme addressed to the Soviet government and Communist Party said: "On behalf of all Moslems, the Convention expresses its gratitude and devotion to Soviet power, the defender of the oppressed peoples of the Orient and promises to support Soviet power in its undertakings to strengthen the gains of the Revolution."

In the early years of Soviet power, the reactionary leaders of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) incited their co-religionists to ignore Soviet laws and urged them to refuse to serve in the Red Army under pretext of the creed. But drawn into the flow of events and faced with a new attitude of the state to their faith, the Pentecostals felt the need to define their attitude to the socialist state and its laws. In 1926 and 1927, conventions of Christians of Evangelical Faith adopted resolutions urging the believers to support all the undertakings of the Soviet government and to abide state legislation without fail. "Having heard the report on the attitude of Christians of Evangelical Faith toward existing Soviet power and military conscription," states a resolution of the 1927 Convention, "the Convention welcomes all the measures of the Soviet power....



Every Christian of Evangelical Faith called up for service in the Red Army, whether at the time of peace or war, must do this service on equal terms with all the citizens of the country."

In 1927, Metropolitan Sergii of the Russian Orthodox Church, later elected Patriarch, appealed to believers with a declaration that called for and gave assurances of the Russian Orthodox Church's loyalty to the Soviet system.

The Soviet Union was laying the foundations of the socialist economy by carrying through socialist industrialisation and collectivisation. The Soviet people's heroic and self-sacrificing labour was crowned with a triumph of historic significance for the whole world. The 17th Congress of the Communist Party, held in 1934, summed up the results of the radical changes in the country. A backward agrarian state, in the past, the Soviet Union had turned into a mighty industrial and agricultural power. The socialist sector became dominant in all spheres of the national economy.

The successful construction of socialism and elimination of the exploitative classes in the USSR by the late 1930s resulted in achievements in all fields of the economy and culture. Profound changes occurred in the people's mentality. These historic changes in the country's life had to affect the social views of believers and the clergy, who now saw for themselves that the socialist system had brought unheard-of benefits and democratic freedoms to the Soviet peoples, including real freedom of conscience. The absolute majority of ministers of all religions adopted a loyal attitude to the socialist state, even at this early period.

The radical changes in the Soviet people's lives were legally formalised in the Soviet Constitution adopted on December 5, 1936. The Constitution of the country where socialism had triumphed established universal, direct and equal suffrage by secret ballot. All kinds of disfranchisement were abolished. Clergymen were entitled to participate in the elections of government bodies at all levels just like all other citizens. Equal rights to work, education, leisure and maintenance in old age were guaranteed to all, atheists and believers alike. Under Article 135 of the 1936 Soviet Constitution, adherence to any religion could not preclude anyone from voting in elections or being elected deputy to any Soviet body of authority.

The loyal position taken by clergymen and, consequently, their efforts to adapt to Soviet life called for more intensive atheistic education of the working people by those responsible for ideological work.

Party organisations everywhere took up the communist education of the working people. More atheist literature was published, more lectures and talks arranged, new museums and other cultural-educational establishments were opened, and courses for propagandists of atheism expanded and began to be held more regularly. But the Soviet people's peaceful work was broken by the war. The Communist Party raised the country to defend itself against the Nazi invaders.

*The Clergy and the Church in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945*

The Soviet people defended their socialist gains, honour, freedom and independence and saved the nations of Europe from Nazism in the battle against a strong, insidious enemy. The victory of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War was a victory for the socialist system, for Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the Soviet armed forces.

Thousands of heroes reared by the Communist Party on the ideals of true freedom, Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalism gave up their lives for their country's independence and freedom, for socialism. Marxist-Leninist ideas cemented the people's morale and made them steadfast, courageous and invincible.

Religious people fought alongside atheists on the frontlines and at the rear. They worked and died not for the glory of God, nor for religious ideals, but fought against foreign invaders—defending their country, their homes, families and relatives. They did their patriotic duty. The believers who worked selflessly at the rear or fought on the frontlines were people educated by the Soviet system, who recognised the truth of the Soviet way of life and were willing to defend it. Many clergymen, too, showed patriotism during the War, but their patriotism was dictated primarily by the patriotism of their parishioners. Any different stance would have brought about the clergy's total isolation from their flock.

Some modern theologians tend to overestimate the contribution made by the church to defeating the enemy. The behaviour of believers during the War, of course, was influenced first and foremost by the advantages of the Soviet socialist system, which had liberated the working people from poverty and exploitation, by democratism of public life, freedoms given to the people by the Revolution, although it cannot be denied that from the very start of the War, almost all the religious organisations in the USSR took a patriotic stand. Metropolitan Sergii, who headed the Russian Orthodox Church at that time, sent an epistle to the country's believers on June 22, 1941 stating that the church was faithful to the socialist system and strongly condemning the fascist German aggression. In his patriotic speech on June 26, 1941 the Metropolitan called upon believers to rise up against the invaders.

His closest associate, Metropolitan Aleksii, led believers' patriotic activities in besieged Leningrad. A majority of the clergy supported the people's war efforts and that, undoubtedly, was good for the cause. But the church took advantage of the war-time situation to strengthen itself organisationally. A council of bishops was convened in September 1943 to elect Metropolitan Sergii Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

Patriarch Sergii died on May 15, 1944. His successor—the Patriarchate *locum tenens* Aleksii—sent a letter to Joseph Stalin on May 20, 1944 confirming that the course of the Orthodox Church directed to a loyal relationship with the Soviet state and social system remained unchanged. "In my impending activities," he wrote, "I shall be guided invariably by the principles which marked the deceased Patriarch's church work: following the Church's canons and statutes, and constant loyalty to my country and government headed by you."

Representatives of other denominations and most believers and clergymen in the occupied territories also acted patriotically. Some priests helped partisans behind the enemy's lines.

But there were also churchmen who collaborated with the Nazis during the War. They committed treason and were guilty of complicity in the bloody atrocities of fascism. Traitors in cassocks turned up who blessed "*die neue Ordnung*", prayed for

Nazi military victory, helped the Nazis send Soviet people off into German slavery, and tried to undermine resistance to the invaders. At the start of the War, the Nazis helped to open places of worship, to distribute religious literature and intensify activities by the clergy in the occupied territories. While acting in this fashion, they did not care, of course, about religion or the religious feelings of believers but looked to the church for support in their designs to exterminate the Soviet people. It was common practice to raid churches during prayers and "to catch slaves", aided by Christ-loving traitors. In August 1941, for instance, a so-called Pskov Orthodox Mission was set up in the occupied regions near Pskov, Leningrad and Novgorod. It was headed by Metropolitan Sergii of Riga and encouraged by the German High Command.

A group of treacherous clergymen formed a Byelorussian Orthodox Autocephalous ("independent") Church in Byelorussia in 1942. Its organisers included Metropolitan Panteleimon, Archbishop Philopheus of Mogilev and Mstislavl, Bishop Athanasius of Vitebsk and Polotsk and Bishop Stephan of Smolensk and Bryansk. The traitors in cassocks collaborated with the invaders. Archbishop Philopheus thus outlined the church's main objective when he wrote to Byelorussia's Commissar General, SS *Gruppenführer* von Gottberg on July 30, 1942: "The Orthodox hierarchy and priests should use all their religious and moral influence and their authority as priests to separate our people from Bolshevism and its alien mentality." There were traitors among the Orthodox priests in the Ukraine. They formed an autocephalous church of their own with Bishop Sikorsky of Vladimir-Volynsky, a former follower of Petlyura, at its head. Especially zealous in collaborating with the enemy were ministers of the Uniate Church, headed by Count Sheptitsky and preachers of some sectarian communities.

The German occupation authorities permitted many religious sects to openly operate, provided their members collaborated with the invaders. When I. Panko, an active Pentecostal, asked the Nazi authorities for permission for Pentecostal religious communities to function openly, he received an insolently frank reply from an SD officer who said that the Germans would permit such Pentecostal communities if the believers obeyed all the in-

vaders' orders, did not participate in any subversion against them and did not help the partisans. At his trial in 1950, Panko admitted that he had accepted the demands made by the SD officer. But the cassock-garbed Quislings were grossly mistaken in thinking the Nazis had no ulterior motives in encouraging the revival of religious communities on the occupied territories. In fact, it was a ruse to conceal far-reaching plans for complete destruction of the peoples' traditional faiths and customs in the occupied countries. Talking to his retinue on April 11, 1942, Hitler cynically said that "in the interests of governing the conquered peoples in the East of the Empire, the main principle should be the utmost possible encouragement of striving for individual freedom and suppression of any state organisation". Hitler gave instructions at this meeting to split up churches against their will, to force the population in the occupied regions to change their religion and "to forbid setting up single churches for any large Russian territories". Said Hitler: "Such a situation would be in our interests—if every village would have a sect of its own developing its own image of God. Even if, in this case, shaman cults similar to those of Negroes or American Indians would spring up in some villages, we should welcome this, because it would increase the number of factors subdividing the Russian space into smaller units."

The Nazis desecrated the customs and faiths of nations in the territories that they had managed to occupy for a time, did violence to Orthodox sacred places and objects of worship, unceremoniously offended believers' religious sensibilities and crudely trampled upon religious freedom. "The German occupation has disrupted the unity of the Church life," said Metropolitan Filaret at a Council of the Russian Orthodox Church. "Dioceses lost archbishops and bishops, there was shortage of priests, many places of worship have been destroyed." The clergy and believers saw for themselves what the policy of Nazi Germany really meant for the church. *The Truth about Religion in Russia*, a book published by the Moscow Patriarchate, stated: "One could not imagine a more insolent and cynical outrage upon places and objects of worship."

The Nazi invaders have proved themselves to be not only sworn enemies of all freedom, but of religious freedom as well,

and the traitors in cassocks revealed their true faces in the eyes of believers. Modern theologians do not like to recall such sad facts as the collaboration of churchmen with the Nazis. Sermons and the church press, however, tend to overestimate the patriotic contribution made by the church to the Soviet people's struggle against the Nazi invaders. The Soviet state had not been indifferent to the clergy's behaviour during the War. Most of the clergymen supported the people's efforts in the War and this was undoubtedly good for the cause.

People became more religious during the War and the clergy did not fail to take advantage of the situation. Supervision of observance of the legislation on religious worship had declined and scientific atheistic propaganda was greatly curtailed. The church was gathering strength through the people's misery and sufferings. The patriotic stance taken by the clergy, including a drive to raise funds for the Red Army also helped. There is no doubt, of course, that faith in God was of no help to the people in their fight against the insidious enemy.

The political loyalty of the church and of the majority of clergymen at this trying time clearly attested to the change in the church's social position under the socialist system and to the triumph of real freedom of conscience in the Soviet Union.

The Second Council of the Russian Orthodox Church was held in January 1945. It had a decisive significance for the Church's further evolution and for its adaptation to Soviet life. Following the sentiments of the believers, the Church openly condemned imperialism, recognised the superiority of socialism over capitalism, praised the progress of socialist construction in the USSR, and stated its support for the liberation movement of nations oppressed by imperialism. The Council elected Metropolitan Aleksii Patriarch of All Russia. It was the first time in history that the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church was elected in the presence of heads (or their deputies) of almost all autocephalous churches, thus demonstrating the unity of Orthodox churches the world over. The Council denounced slanderous fabrications about alleged persecution of the Church in the USSR. The Local Council and Patriarch Aleksii completed the normalisation of relations between the Church and the state begun by Patriarch Sergii.

During the last years of his life, Patriarch Aleksii was a passionate peace worker; he exposed the instigators of a new war and participated actively in the peace movement. He was awarded orders and medals by the Soviet government for his patriotic peace activities. A loyal attitude to the Soviet state predominated in all religions after the War. The communities of Moslems, Buddhists, Jews, or members of the Armenian, Georgian, Roman Catholic, Evangelical Christian churches, Old Believers, adherents to Evangelical Christian Baptists and many other denominations functioning in the USSR actively support the socialist system and the foreign and domestic policies of the CPSU and Soviet government.

While the overwhelming majority of the clergy and believers are loyal to the socialist system, there are people among them who try to incite believers to illegal actions. For example, illegal activities of religious fanatics have recently taken place in some parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church. Individual parish priests began to preach and perform religious ceremonies outside places of worship and tried to interfere with religious associations' finances and management. They were not supported by most of the clergy and faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church. This became clear at the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, which took place in 1971. The Council, where priests as well as laymen were present, again spoke in favour of the official stance of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was patriotic and loyal to the Soviet state, to its domestic and foreign policies. "We know," the Council stated, "how difficult were the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet state in the post-revolutionary period. We do not exonerate from blame the many church figures who failed to comprehend the historical significance of the October events for beneficial transformations in our country and for altering the course of history for the whole world, as they had been closely connected with the ruling classes and lost their advantages during the Great October Socialist Revolution."

This loyalty toward the Soviet socialist system is characteristic of all religions, including Islam. Moslems, just like other believers, enjoy complete freedom and inviolability in the USSR. The October Revolution has abolished social and national in-

equality and created the conditions for spiritual emancipation of the formerly backward nations. The ruling classes overthrown by the Revolution left a poor legacy. The population of the outlying areas was almost completely illiterate. As late as the mid-1920s, 82 per cent of the population of Kazakhstan and over 90 per cent in the Central Asian republics were illiterate.

Religion controlled the people's spiritual life and their family relations before the Revolution. The enormous economic and socio-political reforms introduced during the socialist construction to equalise the development of all the nationalities of the USSR helped the peoples of the Soviet East overcome their former backwardness. The growth of culture, of public education and the Party's varied work on communist education of the masses were prerequisites for extensive dissemination of a scientific materialistic world-outlook among working people. Just as in the other regions of the country, the influence of religion on the population decreased considerably and Moslems gave their unqualified support to the domestic and foreign policies of the Communist Party and the Soviet government in the same way as did the adherents to other creeds. The mood of mullahs has also changed radically. Moslem priests today prefer not to remember the former confrontation with Soviet power and often even claim, contrary to the historical fact, that the Moslem priesthood welcomed Soviet power and its reforms immediately after the Revolution. Nowadays, following the sentiments of believers, the mullahs try to convince them that communism, as a world-outlook, can co-exist with religion. They proclaimed communism to be a "living embodiment of the ideas and aspirations of Muhammad". "One can say without any hesitation," stated one of the preachers at a Moslem conference held in Tashkent in October 1970, "that the capitalist system based on injustice and exploitation is bound to fall and will be replaced by the socialist system based on just laws. The laws of God are inexorable and justice will triumph on earth."

A message that the Moslem Religious Board for Central Asia and Kazakhstan sent out to all the mosques on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Soviet power said: "It is difficult to overestimate the immense importance of the Great October Socialist Revolution for comprehensive development of



the peoples of Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan, who have reached such a level of economic and cultural growth over several decades that they have surpassed many of the developed countries in Western Europe in such short a time." The message expressed deep gratitude on behalf of all Moslems for the great changes introduced into their life by Soviet power and pledged that Moslem believers would work selflessly to build up the new society together with the entire Soviet people.

The political loyalty of the priests does not mean that they have reconciled themselves to the ideological concepts of communism. Unfortunately, few people realise this. Having heard a lot of such preaching, believers are sometimes inclined to think that religion does not contradict the communist world-outlook. But the clergy's adaptation to present-day conditions lulls not only believers, but also some atheists who cease to see the harmful side of religion. It is not chance that some intellectuals tend to consider certain moral precepts of the church useful. It would be appropriate to recall what Lenin said about philistines and liberal intellectuals who were afraid to combat religion, forgot about their task, and tolerated belief in God.

### *What Does the Evolution of Religion Really Mean?*

Even though it is adapted to current conditions, religion does not change its anti-scientific nature. The cultural growth of the Soviet people, their belief in the unlimited possibilities of science and technology, and their enthusiasm over the greatness of communist construction—all these factors tend to alienate people from religion. The clergy, therefore, faces the task of strengthening religion and preserving its influence with believers.

The church's ideological re-orientation is manifested by its attitude to science, communist ideals, and society's moral progress. In the past, the clergy declared science and communism "ungodly". Today theologians say more and more often that religion does not contradict science and communism, they try to convince believers that there is no conflict between knowledge and religion, they recognise the benefit of science and education. The process of renovation, of "updating" religious dogmas is characteristic of all faiths. In their sermons and religious conversations with believers, clergymen strive to conceal

the opposition and irreconcilability between the scientific and religious conceptions of the world, and to make religious dogmas look scientific. They do not stint praise for the achievements of science. Father V. Povetkin, for instance, taught his parishioners: "Science and religion are barren when they are apart as the world's most beautiful bridegroom and bride. I shall perform marriage ceremonies over them now and, having become husband and wife, religion and science will be father and mother of the truth which will warm our hearts as the sun in spring.... It is impossible to imagine a better situation for strongly influencing the minds than the word of science from the lips of a priest!" "Because Allah had singled out Man from the environment of other creatures and made him a caliph (successor) of his," said a preacher in the Moscow mosque, "this obliges Man to be the master of nature and, following a straight path, to subjugate its gifts to himself, to try to improve his life using his knowledge of sciences and to try to be of use to people and society."

Similar views are propagated by the ministers of other religions, too. "The word of God," said Karev, a famous Evangelical preacher, "is God's answer to many questions of our soul—not of our mind but of our soul. It is science that gives answers to the questions of the mind. But it is the word of God that answers the questions of the soul." This concept is not new. The idealists of the past also claimed that there was no contradiction between science and religion and asserted that religion only supplemented science and vice versa. Trying to adapt themselves to the sentiments of present-day believers, clergymen of all religions spare no effort to convince their flock that the church has always been a supporter of progress and nowadays makes an invaluable contribution to the Soviet people's causes and undertakings. Such preaching often looks convincing for credulous parishioners.

The clergy's time-serving has been and still is a serious obstacle preventing believers from parting with religion. It must be remembered that new arguments are needed to expose the anti-scientific nature of modern religion because "sophisticated" religion, as Lenin pointed out, is even more dangerous.

Religion does not evolve smoothly. While obsolete rituals in worship have been discarded, attributes of former ignorance,

such as witch-doctors, false healing of the sick, prophesies and other "miracles" are still alive. Their alleged sanctity is preserved under cover of religion. This is true for all religions but, perhaps, most of all for Islam. One can discern in the evolution of social concepts in present-day Islam the desire of Moslem preachers to convince the believers that Islam is ineradicable and that the most important tenets of the creed are of ever-lasting value. "In contrast to Judaism, Christianity and other religions," asserted an official of the Moslem Religious Board for Transcaucasia, "religion of Islam is more flexible and meets modern conditions quite well. Islamic religion will continue to exist also under communism, not like it is now but in a modernised form after the far-fetched and obsolete propositions have been removed from it."

Sociological studies in the last few years show that all religions, Islam included, increasingly lose their adherents. And even those customs and rituals that had a religious significance in the past are gradually changing their meaning and in many cases are observed only to keep up the traditions. Although Islam is not so influential as it was before, it still has a certain effect on people in Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Transcaucasia, especially on the elderly. It should be borne in mind that Moslem religion has absorbed certain traditional folk rites and customs, making them religious. This is why even now some people do not see any difference between real folk rites and customs and religious ceremonies. Today, when science and technology and the whole way of life repudiate the reactionary religious functions, there are, unfortunately, individuals who do not believe in God but perform religious ceremonies thinking naïvely that they are of folk origin.

### *Sectarianism in the USSR and Its Evolution*

In addition to Orthodoxy, Islam and Roman Catholic Church, tsarist Russia had a large network of sectarian associations and groups of believers. Many of them were regarded as mistaken creeds and were brutally suppressed. There were quite a few victims of despotism of the tsarist regime and of the Russian Orthodox Church among rank-and-file sectarians. The secta-

rian leaders who had generally managed to escape persecution at pre-revolutionary time, took advantage of the freedoms guaranteed by Soviet power to the believers of all denominations and began publicising themselves and their sects as former fighters against tsarism. This propaganda increased the membership of the sects during the early years of Soviet rule.

The New Economic Policy resulted in a temporary revival of private enterprise and growth of the petty bourgeoisie in the cities and in the countryside. The petty-bourgeois environment had always been a source of sectarianism. Religious preachers profited by the situation. Thus the number of sectarian communities in Leningrad and Leningrad gubernia increased by nearly 50 per cent from 47 in 1923 to 58 in 1924, 73 in 1925 and 80 in 1926.

The sects expanded for many reasons. First of all, the October Revolution stopped persecuting sectarians as they had been under tsarism. Furthermore, the well-being of peasants was improving rapidly at the start of the reconstruction period. This caused the neutralist sentiment to spread among them, such sentiment being in tune with sectarian ideology.

Sectarianism also spread because believers were leaving the Russian Orthodox Church. The latter had been defending the interests of the exploiter classes for centuries. Having been given land by Soviet power, the numerous rural poor and middle peasants witnessed the furious resistance to Soviet power put up by the overthrown classes together with Russian Orthodox clergymen. They were not prepared yet for a complete rupture with faith and for acceptance of proletarian atheism. Denial of God and the Russian Orthodox Church oriented against the Soviets were two "extreme" ideologies that could not satisfy the middle peasants and the petty bourgeoisie in the cities who were neutral and temporising at the moment. Aroused to activity in matters of belief, they sought a middle way. That was why some adherents to the Russian Orthodox Church turned to sects whose leaders did not call openly upon their followers to fight against Soviet power. The petty-bourgeois elements in the cities and in the countryside were attracted by the sectarian preaching of mutual assistance and voluntary sharing of property. And while the people's religiosity in general did not increase at that time,

the specific social processes in the classes led to the outflow of believers from Orthodoxy into sects.

There were also subjective reasons why the sects had suddenly become active. The growth of sectarian membership soon after the Revolution was partially a result of the atheistic propaganda being too narrow in scope. The propagandists were better prepared to expose the reactionary meaning of the Orthodox Church and there was almost no combatting the sectarian ideology at that initial stage. Dissatisfied with the priests who were clearly against the people, some of the believers converted to a priestless denomination, i.e. joined sects. But this tendency towards sectarianism was short-lived.

During collectivisation, the kulak elements, who had become leaders of many sects, tried to provoke their adherents to anti-social actions, causing masses of ordinary members to protest. As a result, things came to a head in the sects. Faced with the successful socialist industrialisation and collectivisation of agriculture, the Party's immense effort to educate working people in the communist spirit, and the great economic and cultural improvements, sectarianism in the USSR in general entered a deep crisis in the early 1930s. Sects started to collapse after the First Five-Year Plan was adopted and after the success of complete collectivisation became apparent. The sectarians began joining collective farms and leaving their sects. The formerly numerous sects of Sabbatarians, New Israelites, Christ Believers, Dukhobors (the deniers of the divinity of the Holy Ghost), Castratoes and Molokans practically ceased to exist. Baptists, Adventists and Pentecostals managed to prevent their sects from total collapse, but their membership greatly diminished before the War.

The militant actions of the sect leaders against collectivisation, as well as the Christian preaching of forgiveness in the atmosphere of an acute class struggle and the growing threat of war increasingly made the believers wonder if they were on the right track. This and the direct collaboration of sectarian leaders with the invaders during the War were the reasons why many sects did not succeed in attracting new members even the war years. The Adventists, for example, lost more than half their members during the War.

This crisis was also typical of the sects in the post-war years, which was deeper than that of the Orthodox Church and Moslem religion, as can be seen from dynamics of the sect memberships.

Under their existing internal regulations and rules, most of the sects register their members by name, thus permitting to find their exact numbers. At the moment, there are several hundred thousand sectarians left in all the sects functioning in the USSR, half of them being Evangelical Christian Baptists. The crisis in the sects and withdrawal of believers from religion are slanderously portrayed by bourgeois propaganda as a result of manipulation by atheists and of alleged religious "persecution". But in reality, the adherents of small denominations, just like all Soviet citizens, enjoy all the benefits of socialism. Most of them work honestly and selflessly and support the domestic and foreign policies of the Communist Party and the Soviet government. Along with the adherents of other creeds, the sectarians celebrate their rites freely, go to public prayers or perform other acts of public worship. The state authorities do not interfere in their internal affairs. They are only required to observe the laws on worship and maintain public order.

Take, for example, the Evangelical Christian Baptists. Their activities are not hindered in any way. They freely gather for public prayers and celebrate their rituals. They publish religious literature as needed. The believers elect their pastors themselves without any interference from the authorities. Conventions held every 5 years in accordance with their rules elect their religious centre—the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists. It publishes a journal entitled *Bratskii vestnik* (Brotherhood Herald), prayer-books and theological works. The Council maintains contacts with related church organisations in other countries. The absolute majority of the members of this sect are loyal to the Soviet state and work honestly together with all the Soviet people. They strictly adhere to the socialist standards of behaviour.

However, several years ago a small group of fanatical preachers (Kryuchkov, Vins, Minyakov, Baturin and some others) began campaigning for totally unrestricted sectarian activities and incited the believers to violate Soviet legislation on religious

worship. These extremists managed to break away some believers deceived by their mendacious propaganda from the official church. They went underground and appointed themselves leaders of the splinter sectarian group. In opposition to the legally functioning religious centre—the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists—the leaders of the dissenters set up a so-called Council of the Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists.

Splits in the church and especially in sects are nothing new. In the late 19th century, Engels noted perennial squabbles between believers because “each individual sect considers *its* specific vagary to be the only panacea.”<sup>1</sup> When a church splits over an interpretation of the fundamentals of faith, the socialist state does not interfere in its internal affairs.

The matter was quite different when the Evangelical Christian Baptists had split. The followers of the Council of the Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists have no serious controversy on their creed interpretation with the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists, which complies with Soviet law on worship. Seeking ways to hinder the objective process of believers leaving religion, the dissenters try to explain the crisis in the church by faults in the Soviet legislation on worship. In gross violation of the law, the extremist leaders of the dissenting sectarians incite their followers to have public prayers in the open and to perform religious rituals and ceremonies in the streets and squares. The sectarians attempted to organise schools and groups to teach children religion. When the bulk of the believers did not support them, the fanatics resorted to provocation and went underground. The Council of the Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists declare demagogically that they recognise the decree “On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church” but spread inventions that the current legislation on religious worship is against the Soviet Constitution. Deceiving the believers, they try to justify gross violations of public order and other illegal actions. They arrange underground gatherings where they encourage their co-religionists to evade their civic duties, violate the laws on wor-

<sup>1</sup> “Engels an Victor Adler in Wien” in: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 39, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1968, p. 399.

ship, urge them not to go to the cinema, theatres, civic centres, not to listen to the radio or watch TV. They do not allow them to participate in public organisations.

But such activities, though disguised by religion for deception, cannot be tolerated, of course. The decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church" stressed specifically that no one could evade, on the grounds of his religious beliefs, the civil obligations laid down by the Constitution of the USSR for all citizens. "Enjoyment by citizens of their rights and freedoms must not be to the detriment of the interests of society or the state, or infringe the rights of other citizens," says Article 39 of the USSR Constitution. Each citizen is obliged to observe Soviet laws, to respect the socialist standards of behaviour and to uphold the honour and dignity of Soviet citizenship.

Exercise of rights and freedoms by the citizens in the Soviet Union is inseparable from the performance of their duties. The leaders of the Council of the Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists conduct anti-social activities and grossly violate Soviet laws, and then claim they are being persecuted for faith.

Demanding renovation and reform of their church, the adherents of the Council of the Churches distribute leaflets, letters and appeals to believers aimed at isolating them from everyday life and strengthening their fear of "God's judgement" and "torment in Hell". In their sermons and letters to believers, the dissenters defame "the sinful ways of the world". They ignore the law and urge their co-religionists to teach children religion at schools specially set up for that purpose.

The most far-sighted leaders of Evangelical Christian Baptists realise that all their attempts to provoke their supporters to disrespect for the Soviet state have met with distrust of the believers and the church has always lost a considerable part of its flock that way. This fact, in particular, brought about a paper entitled "The Christian and the Motherland" by A. V. Karev, a prominent Baptist preacher. The paper was widely discussed in communities. Resolutely objecting to the dissenters and stating that the believers cannot be "hermits keeping aloof from life of their people", Karev called upon his co-religionists to love their Motherland, to respect their government and obey



the law. He said to the believers: "One cannot forget that the Motherland is not only one's loved country with wonderful nature, with the people dear to one's heart, with great achievements in science and arts and with a glorious history. The Motherland is a state with the state power and laws and the tasks of a Christian also include a correct attitude to the authorities." Karev was a faithful adherent of the Church of Evangelical Christian Baptists, but he was aware that all attempts to push believers into a conflict with the Soviet state have always led to an acute crisis in the church and to a loss of a large part of its supporters.

Many ordinary believers who had responded to the appeals of the dissenters soon returned to registered associations after explanatory work conducted by local authorities. Still others began to doubt whether their leaders were right in their action and break off with sectarianism for good.

The evolution of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) is complex and contradictory.

Religious Pentecostals in the USSR are divided into followers of Voronaev, Shmidt and Smorodin and into Pentecostals of God. Most of the Pentecostals function in the Western regions of the Ukraine and Byelorussia, in Moldavia and Kazakhstan. There are small groups in the RSFSR and in Kirghizia and Georgia.

The collaboration of many Pentecostal leaders with the Nazi invaders in the occupied territories during the War compromised and greatly damaged the sect's influence. A large part of the Pentecostal groups turned to legal activities in the first years after the War in response to their members' demands. There is not much difference between the creeds and practices of public worship of Pentecostals and Baptists and, as a result, many Pentecostal communities merged with societies of Evangelical Christian Baptists and joined the All-Union Council of the latter in the first post-war years to perform their religious rites within the current law on religious worship. Fanatic leaders of this sect, however, such as Bidash, Ivanov and Ukrainets, soon managed to take away part of the believers. Having proclaimed the registration of religious communities by the authorities to be against the Gospel, they began inciting their followers to violate laws and to organise secret gatherings.

Extreme mysticism and fanaticism, denial of everything earthly and of the Soviet way of life are preached in such Pentecostal groups. Some of them maintain cruel forms of worship, speaking with other tongues is encouraged and propagated, as are various visions, prophecies, long fasts, and exhausting prayers detrimental to the health. Some Pentecostals have held such gatherings until recently with limited attendance, deeply underground and at night, as a rule.

Considering that many Pentecostals hold Voronaev, the founder of the sect, in particularly high esteem, the fanatics and extremists deliberately distort Voronaev's socio-political views, trying to take advantage of his former prestige in order to keep the believers under their control. This stance caused protests some time ago from those sincerely religious people who had known Voronaev personally and were his associates in the Pentecostal Union, which existed in the 1920s. In May 1960, *Znamya kommunizma*, a newspaper published in Odessa, received an open letter from G. G. Panurko, the former chairman of the Pentecostal Union, and M. S. But and N. V. Kuzmenko, its Board members. They wrote: "We worked together with Voronaev in the Union organised by him and were members of its leadership. Voronaev always protested against various fanatical acts ... namely: prophecies, visions, leading by spirit and other phenomena contradictory to the sane doctrine... We confirm that there was a resolution at a convention of Pentecostals in 1927 proposed by Voronaev and approved by the whole convention on the attitude to the Soviet state and on doing military service on equal terms with all citizens." Panurko made similar statements in the church press. Thus, the deceptions of the extremist leaders were exposed. Developments and concentrated atheistic work had a decisive effect on the Pentecostals that made them change their stance.

Work with ordinary Pentecostals to explain the humane principles of freedom of conscience assured under the Soviet Constitution and under Soviet laws on religious worship has been intensified everywhere lately. It helped to liberate believers from the influence of their fanatic leaders. As a result, a great number of Pentecostals stopped illegal activities and joined registered societies of Evangelical Christian Baptists.

In 1969, the Council for Religious Affairs sent out special explanatory circulars advising local authorities not to interfere with those Pentecostals who have turned away from illegal activities and were joining registered communities of Evangelical Christian Baptists and, in some cases, to register Pentecostal communities autonomously, provided they discarded cruel rites and recognised and observed Soviet laws.

Reactionary Pentecostal leaders tried their hardest to prevent believers from converting to registered societies. In some places, they even went to houses of prayer of registered societies and tried to keep their former adherents out. But in most cases the process of Pentecostals turning away from illegal activities and their quest for ways of satisfying their religious needs within the legislation on religious worship was not to be reversed.

The Seventh-Day Adventists were a prosecuted sect before the October Revolution and therefore were few in Russia. They started vigorous propaganda of their creed in the early years of Soviet power, when given freedom for unrestricted preaching. Before the Revolution, Seventh-Day Adventists could be found mainly in the Ukraine, Northern Caucasus, in the Baltic regions and in the Crimea, whereas in the early 1920s the sect succeeded in setting up its communities also in some regions of Central Russia, the Volga Area, Siberia and in the Far East. There were more than 7,000 adherents of that sect in 1920, and this number almost doubled by 1925, although the growth rate slowed down in the next 5 years, despite vigorous missionary activities. The Adventist movement entered a deep crisis in the early 1930s caused by enormous changes in the country's public and economic life. Inasmuch as village individual households had been the source of Adventism in the pre-revolutionary era and in the first decades of Soviet rule, the triumph of the collective-farm system caused this source to shrink. Many communities diminished so much in the late 1930s that they had to declare themselves closed. There were no more than 10,000-11,000 Adventists left in 1940.

During the War, despite the fact that the sect had well-versed preachers who were very active in missionary work and that the communities dissolved in the pre-war years began functioning again, not a single one of them managed to exceed their

pre-war membership. Very few people joined religious societies of Adventists anew during the War. The number of Adventists had declined by the end of the War even in their traditional strongholds, such as Latvia and Estonia. Similar processes took place in other regions. For example, the Novosibirsk community had 34 members in 1932 and there were only 14 left in 1947. The number of believers in Tula decreased from 47 to 39 during the same period and Moscow had only 151 Adventists when they were registered in 1945 while they were 538 in 1930. The All-Union Council of Seventh-Day Adventists, a religious centre of the sect that existed in the post-war period, admitted that the number of followers of Adventism declined more than twice during the War. The sect regained its pre-war level only in 1947. The war severely damaged the country's economy and brought misery and suffering to millions of Soviet people. The hardships of the first post-war years gave rise to a religious revival of sorts. Seventh-Day Adventists made use of these hardships in order to swell their ranks. The characteristic features of the sect are strictly centralised administration, high prestige of the preachers, and constant emphasis on "the forthcoming advent of Christ" which allows the Adventist leaders to keep their flock under control.

Taking advantage of the weakened control over observance of the legislation on worship and grossly violating these laws, the Council launched a wide missionary campaign with travelling preachers. Instructed by the religious centre, large groups of missionary sectarians, using the system of government-sponsored recruitment of workers to outlying areas, began moving after the War from the Ukraine and Moldavia to the Northern Caucasus, Central Asia, the Urals, Siberia and the Far East and started to enlist members at new settlements. The membership of Adventists was growing almost everywhere soon after the War. Many of their communities increased rapidly in Western regions of the Ukraine and Moldavia. There were 21,500 Adventists in 1964.

This was followed by a short period of stabilisation in the numerical strength of Adventism and then a decline has started in many communities since the mid-1960s, which the leaders have been unable to stop for many years. New members do not make for natural losses in most of the communities. The process of

weakening that started in the sect of Seventh-Day Adventists two decades ago still continues. This was also a result of measures taken by central and local authorities to increase control over observance of laws on worship and also of atheist work conducted among believers.

Now, as before, Adventists who recognise legislation on worship, gather in their houses of prayer for public worship, celebrate their rites and perform religious ceremonies without any hindrance. But the activities of many communities recognising the laws on worship are autonomous today. The most fanatical of the sectarian leaders try to restore their lost position by resorting to illegal work. But they fail in their designs.

Things came to a head in other sects as well. Associations of Molokans, very active in the past, now almost ceased to exist. Most of the Molokan communities functioning in the USSR, have public prayers only on Sundays attended by no more than 30-40 per cent of registered members and of old age as a rule. Children and young people almost never go to prayers. Funeral services and prayers for the dead are the most regular rituals celebrated by Molokans. Baptism and marriage ceremonies have virtually come to naught. No more than 7-8 baptisms and 30-40 marriage ceremonies have been performed annually for the last few years in all the registered Molokan houses of prayer.

A sect of Khlysts, who branched away from the Molokans in the distant past, is also fast on the decline. Secrecy, denial of the flesh, mysticism, and ascetism have compromised the creed and its preachers in the eyes of modern believers, as have its prohibition against members going to the cinema and theatres, listening to the radio and watching TV, so the Khlyst leaders have been unable to gather even small groups of adherents for prayers for the last decade. The most zealous supporters of the sect cannot even hope nowadays to organise the traditional flagellant rites.

But perhaps the most complex and contradictory is the evolution of Jehovah's Witnesses. The organisers and inspirers of this sect outside the USSR have taken great pains to make their struggle against the revolutionary movement under the guise of religion more effective, to poison the masses with anti-Communism and anti-Sovietism. The spread of Jehovism in the Soviet

Union began after World War I. Sect ideologists based in Brooklyn (New York) started their missionary work in the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia in the early 1920s with the consent of the Polish government. Then they moved to the Transcarpathian area, the Baltic regions and to Moldavia. They were legal and actively cooperated with the pre-war Polish regime and reactionary circles of the bourgeois Baltic governments. They succeeded in setting up a branch office of the Brooklyn centre in Lvov just before World War II. It provided a religious cover for active anti-Soviet propaganda suggesting to supporters that socialism in the USSR was just a "zigzag in history, an accidental, temporary development". By praising the supposed advantages of the bourgeois way of life, the ideologists of the Brooklyn centre of Jehovah's Witnesses spared no effort to penetrate inside the USSR and to win over ideologically wavering Soviet people to their creed. In 1942, Nathan Knorr, the leader of Jehovah's Witnesses, set up (in Berne, Switzerland) a so-called European office of the New World Society which controlled, among others, a "regional bureau" of the sect, which acted in the territories of the Ukraine and Byelorussia, occupied at that time by the Nazis. The sectarian leaders collaborated with the invaders and did not even speak out against the atrocities of the Nazis.

After Nazism was routed and the Soviet land liberated, the groups of Jehovah's Witnesses set up on Soviet territory went underground and continued their missionary work in secret. But despite great efforts by their overseas patrons, Jehovah's Witnesses have not been a success in the USSR and their field of operation is quite narrow. Most of Jehovah's Witnesses are concentrated in several regions, territories and republics where there are small groups of their followers. This sect is an extremely reactionary, anti-social religious group in its creed and inner organisation. It is highly centralised, based on strict discipline and mutual responsibility, preaching extreme mysticism and isolation of the members from their milieu. Their Brooklyn centre still tries to insinuate anti-communist ideas under religious cover in its publications and often openly urges the adherents to evade their civic duties and to violate the laws of their country. In his speech at a convention of Jehovah's Witnesses in New York on August 3, 1958, Knorr boasted shamelessly that theirs was the only reli-

gion able to liberate the earth from godless communism in the near future.

The Brooklyn centre tries its hardest to prevent the religious activities of its adherents from being legalised. Their magazines *The Watch Tower* and *Awake*, that are distributed to the believers, do what they can to hold them always on the alert, in a state of suspicion to all which is related to the advance of science and technology and which could convincingly refute the tales of theologians. They instill in their co-religionists alienation, distrust and enmity for the atheists.

The sect's extremist leaders demand that members should not be engaged in social production, they forbade them to join trade unions or participate in elections, and incite the youths from Jehovah's Witnesses' families to dodge their military duty. Groups and individuals are being worked on with the objective to hold every rank-and-file believer in obedience, to keep his everyday life, as well as his liturgical and preaching activities, under control and to establish unshakeable authority of the preachers and strict discipline. Their members are taught they must obey every instruction of the Brooklyn religious centre.

The creed of Jehovah's Witnesses is based on a myth of an inevitable Armageddon, i.e. a holy war of Jehovah, the God they worship, against adherents of other faiths and atheists. In their attempts to make the sect more active, the ideologists of Jehovah's Witnesses placed their hopes on the preaching of the approaching Armageddon which was to break out in the autumn of 1975. But it is well known that the Brooklyn leaders have set the date of the "holy war" more than once before: in 1914, 1925, 1927 and 1929. Every time when the believers were disappointed, many members left the sect. In the latest case, the clamorous campaign urging the believers to get prepared for the Armageddon was launched at a convention of Jehovah's Witnesses in Munich in 1969. In April 1969, *Awake* even published a chart of mankind's history for 6,000 years with figures pointing to October 1975 for the Armageddon. The leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses related their missionary work to the approach of the Armageddon. The believers were told again and again that the salvation of everyone in that war would depend on how active his religious and missionary work would be. There were some fanatics among the

sect adherents who spread rumours that the Armageddon was approaching but most of the sectarians did not believe the prophecies from Brooklyn.

In the Soviet system, the believers are under the influence of ideas and views directly opposite to and incompatible with traditional religious perception. That is why no exhortations or threats with chastisement from God can stop the profound and inexorable effect made by the Soviet way of life even on the adherents of this closed, reactionary creed. Just as in the past, this Brooklyn provocation of Armageddon has flopped. Faced with the blatant deception, many believers stated that they would leave the sect. "I . . . threw away a veil from my eyes having broken off with this sect of darkness and gloom," said I. Sharaburak, a former leader of Jehovah's Witnesses in the USSR. "We filled our members' heads with the rot of Brooklyn propaganda and they believed us. They believed it because so few of them were literate and they couldn't understand the truth. Brooklyn is very afraid of the literate and tries to keep the believers in the dark."

One of the former leaders of a community of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Transcarpathian area, N. I. Varga, frankly said that it was the desire to get rid of the fear of the Armageddon, which he felt for many years, that was decisive in his liberating himself from religion. "We are happy now," writes I. Forkosh, another resident of that area who had left the sect. "We are happy as people can be when they have built a large house with wide windows in place of a decayed hut where smoke smarted the eyes. Oksana, my wife, and me work in a collective farm. Our eldest son Mikhail is an electrician. He works in Siberia on the construction of the Baikal-Amur Railway. Ivan, another son, will soon go to serve in the Soviet Army. Nikolai, Nadezhda and Vassily still go to school. Vitya, our youngest, will go next year. Our children will never know the fear of the Armageddon that had tormented us for many years."

Influenced by the Soviet reality and by an enormous educational work conducted by the Communist Party, state and public organisations, many believing Jehovah's Witnesses become less zealous; they begin to question the real nature of the religious values and political attitudes propagated by the Brooklyn centre. Serious controversy arises between the everyday consciousness



of the believers and the recommendations of their religious centre. More and more believers wonder why the Brooklyn centre directs its main efforts against the USSR when it has declared war on all governments which refuse to recognise the belief in Jehovah as the only God. In view of this, the believers often protest against the blatant anti-Sovietism of most of the appeals of their religious centre. In January 1968, a large group of Jehovah's Witnesses residing in the region of Irkutsk, published an open letter in the newspaper *Vostochno-Sibirskaya Pravda* calling upon all adherents to this denomination to break any connections with the anti-Soviet Brooklyn centre. "We are especially worried now that Jehovah's Witnesses become increasingly involved in fighting against Soviet power," they wrote. "Due to this, our Bible and Tract Society, based, it seemed, on religious convictions turned essentially into a reactionary political organisation."

The trend in favour of autonomy and breaking the ties with the Brooklyn centre have spread rather widely in recent years among believers in Moldavia and in the Ukrainian regions of Chernovtsi, Ivano-Frankovsk and Lvov. More and more Jehovah's Witnesses are now socially productive, no longer alienated and suspicious, join trade unions and subscribe to magazines and newspapers.

Most of Jehovah's Witnesses have changed their attitude toward civic duty and enjoy the benefits of modern life. Thus many of them have cars, motorcycles, refrigerators and radio sets. During the first post-war years, Jehovah's Witnesses let their children go to school only as far as the 4th or 5th form, did not allow them to join the Young Pioneers and the Young Communist League or to study and operate engineering devices, whereas now many children of such families after 8 years of school enroll at vocational schools.

A considerable number of Jehovah's Witnesses go to the polls during elections. It is rare now that a young man from a family of Jehovah's Witnesses refuses military duty because of his religion. Many former believers break off with the sect after they have served in the army.

The crisis in religion makes ideologists of all denominations seek new ways and means to adapt to present-day conditions.

Sermons, especially at the Russian Orthodox places of worship, have been irregular until recently. They have been based on religious and mystical subjects. Today the sermons more often use terminology in tune with the times, they try to answer topical questions of the day and to react to the most important events in Soviet life. In their attempts to hold the believers under their influence, the clergymen lay emphasis on moral and psychological problems.

The sacraments were also modernised. The Russian Orthodox Church, for instance, knows three forms of confession. They include an open confession in public, an individual confession in secret and a general confession. The latter had been permitted only as an exception before but today it is common practice. In the past, the priests were against reading the burial service in the absence of the body, whereas now many of them agree to this ritual formerly incompatible with the church canons. Eighty per cent of all the burial services in Russian Orthodox churches are performed *in absentia*. When such a burial service is performed, it may be for a person who was not in the church when alive but this does not matter for the priest.

The priests did not have any sanitary regulations for baptism in the past. But they have to change that, too, as the social and sanitary standards of the population rise. Thus, at the request of its priests, the executive body of the main cathedral in Gorky, for instance, even devised Sanitary Regulations for Persons Performing the Sacrament of Baptism. Under the Regulations, the priest who performs baptism should wash his hands, make sure that the font is clean and check the water temperature (no less than 34° or 35°C). He is not allowed to place more than one baby into the same water. It is recommended that the font should be thoroughly washed with soap and household soda and then rinsed with potassium permanganate solution. The oil-anointing brushes and the wiping sponge are to be disinfected. Under the Regulations, the priest and his helpers should wear white and clean smocks.

The churchmen try to make religion more attractive for believers and thus to prolong its life. The tendency towards modernising religious creeds was noted by Lenin. He drew the attention of Marxists to the danger of renovated and sophisticated

forms of religion free from archaisms. "A million *physical* sins, dirty tricks, acts of violence and infections," wrote Lenin in his letter to Maxim Gorky, "are much more easily discovered by the crowd, and therefore are much less dangerous, than the *subtle*, spiritual idea of god, dressed up in the most attractive 'ideological' costumes."<sup>1</sup>

The modernisation of the church and its adaptation to present-day conditions are not the reasons for scientific atheistic propaganda to be less vigorous but, on the contrary, to be intensified. Religion, whether old or renovated, has always been an anti-scientific ideology for Marxists because it is against the working people's best interests and its view of the world will remain unacceptable for citizens of socialist society.

#### THE DYNAMICS OF GROWING ATHEISM AND OF THE DECLINE IN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE SOVIET POPULATION

Having explained the origin and meaning of religion, the founders of Marxism-Leninism suggested and substantiated ways to overcoming religious prejudices. Marx and Engels foresaw the future when the masses would be entirely free from religious ideology. Marx wrote to Arnold Ruge in 1842: "...religion in itself is without content, it owes its being not to heaven but to the earth, and with the abolition of distorted reality, of which it is the *theory*, it will collapse of itself."<sup>2</sup> Marx and Engels were convinced that religion would not die away automatically or spontaneously. They regarded it as an ideological weapon effectively used by the reactionary classes against the oppressed. Therefore, they were in favour of fighting priests who pretended to side with workers.<sup>3</sup>

The Marxist thesis on the ways of overcoming religion was grossly distorted by the opportunist Social-Democratic leaders, who put their trust in religion dying away automatically. Such

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "To Maxim Gorky", *Collected Works*, Vol. 35, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, "To Arnold Ruge in Dresden, Cologne, November 30 [1842]" in: Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 395.

<sup>3</sup> See "Marx and Engels in Manchester, Hannover, 25 Sept. 1869" in: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 32, p. 371.

ideas, for example, were propagated by the Dutch Social Democrat Anton Pannekoek who believed that religious prejudices would disappear by themselves. Lenin was resolutely against these views. "We must combat religion—that is the ABC of *all* materialism, and consequently of Marxism,"<sup>1</sup> he wrote. Lenin linked the solution of the problem of liberating the working people from the religious drug to "the concrete practice of the class movement, which aims at eliminating the social roots of religion".<sup>2</sup>

He argued that only "...the class struggle of the working masses could, by comprehensively drawing the widest strata of the proletariat into conscious and revolutionary social *practice*, really free the oppressed masses from the yoke of religion."<sup>3</sup>

The materialist world-outlook incompatible with any belief in supernatural forces is best formed during the struggle against exploitation and during socialist and communist construction. "The real education of the masses," Lenin said, "can never be separated from their independent political, and especially revolutionary, struggle. Only struggle educates the exploited class. Only struggle discloses to it the magnitude of its own power, widens its horizon, enhances its abilities, clarifies its mind, forges its will."<sup>4</sup> The participation of working people in the October Revolution, in Soviet socialist construction and in revolutionary transformation in the socialist countries, as well as in the class battles of the capitalist world have made millions of people everywhere abandon religion, which is a striking proof that Lenin was right in his outline of the ways of liberating the popular masses from religious prejudices.

Atheism is spreading among working people in capitalist society, too. Marx and Engels made this point in their time. But the rise of atheism there is spontaneous. The economy, culture, ideology, everyday life and traditions of a country must undergo radical changes for people to give up religion *en masse*. Marx and Engels wrote in their review of a book by G. F. Daumer, a

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 405.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 241.

German petty-bourgeois publicist: "With every great historical upheaval of social conditions the outlooks and ideas of men, and consequently their religious ideas, are revolutionised."<sup>1</sup>

The liberation of the masses from religion in socialist society is a long and painful process, by no means spontaneous. On the contrary, Lenin repeatedly stressed that the overcoming of religious prejudices has to be guided by the Communist Party at all times. The Party organises broad-ranging educational and atheistic propaganda, exposes the class meaning of religion and seeks to break the ties between religious organisations and the exploitative classes. Lenin armed the Communist Party with a specific plan for liberating the working people from religious ideology. He proved that religion and the clergy had always been used by the ruling classes to oppress the masses in class society. When one socio-economic system was replaced by another and a new exploitative class replaced the old, the social purpose of religion remained unchanged so long as exploitation remained.

Everyone in tsarist Russia was obliged to profess a religion, regardless of his or her convictions. As of 1897, the population of 126.5 million was 69.9 per cent Orthodox, 8.91 per cent Roman Catholic and 10.83 per cent Moslem. There is no mention in the old statistics about persons with no religion. Even those who did not believe in any God or those who observed religious holidays and customs only by force of habit were still registered as believers. Russian Orthodoxy was the established church. Its adherents accounted for over 90 per cent of the population in 34 gubernias out of 96 at the turn of the century. 57 gubernias were more than 50 per cent Orthodox. In 1914, Russia had 77,767 Orthodox churches, 1,025 monasteries and nunneries, 117,915 priests and 94,629 monks, nuns and novices.

While supporting religion, the tsarist government brutally persecuted atheists. Medieval, inquisitorial laws existed in Russia until 1917 "persecuting men for their belief or disbelief, violating men's consciences, and linking cosy government jobs and govern-

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Reviews from the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung. Politisch-Ökonomische Revue* No. 2" in: Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 244.

ment-derived incomes with the dispensation of this or that dope by the established church."<sup>1</sup>

Different classes were affected by religion to different degrees. The enlightened part of the Russian intelligentsia was essentially atheistic. The peasantry was more religious than the workers. Economic dependence gave rise to superstitions in the masses of the oppressed workers and peasants. But not all the people in pre-revolutionary Russia were pious despite the domination of the church ideology. The Christian faith was never a way of life for the entire population in tsarist Russia. "In spite of the profound moral significance attached in general to a strict submission to the church," observed N. I. Kostomarov, a famous Russian historian, "Russian piety was based more on attention to outward ceremonies than on the inner religious feeling."

Russians have never been devout, a result in no small degree of the traditions of revolutionary liberation struggle and the free-thinking spirit of the progressive intelligentsia. Many representatives of Russian social thought spoke resolutely against the domination of people's spiritual life by the church and loudly protested against attempts to portray the masses as bearers of profound religious beliefs. When the great Russian writer Gogol, ill and in a state of spiritual crisis, tried to describe Russian people as devout servants of God, Vissarion Belinsky, the great Russian literary critic and a Revolutionary Democrat responded quickly. "In your opinion," wrote Belinsky in his celebrated *Letter to Gogol*, "the Russian people is the most religious in the world. A lie! The basis of religiosity is piety, reverence, fear of God. But a Russian man pronounces God's name while scratching himself in some places. He says of an icon: it's to pray when good and to cover a pot when not." And elsewhere in the same letter, Belinsky addressed the writer: "Look more closely and you will see that this is a deeply atheistic people by nature. It has still a lot of superstitions but not a trace of religiosity." Belinsky held that mystical exaltation is alien to the Russian people: "It has too much common sense, clear and positive mind for that and in this may lie its enormous historical destiny—in future." He be-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Socialism and Religion", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, pp. 84-85.

lieved that the Russian people would be able to free itself easily from religion and aim at realising their ideals rather than dreaming of the world beyond.

Alexander Herzen, another Revolutionary Democrat, believed that superstitions were produced by the objective conditions of Russian life. Poor, robbed by officials, worn out by labour, a peasant suffered from "poverty with no way out" and ignorance. "He is too crushed, too unhappy not to be superstitious," Herzen wrote. But, he added, "the Russian peasant . . . is indifferent to religion which incidentally is an impenetrable mystery to him. He observes all outward rituals of worship to clear his conscience; he goes to mass on Sunday in order not to think about church any longer for 6 days." Anton Chekhov was also against overestimating Russian religious feelings. To ridicule the God-seekers, he said: "They are cheats, not decadents! They sell rotten goods. . . . Religion, mysticism and all sorts of devilry! The Russian peasant has never been pious and he has long put the devil under a sweating shelf in the steam bath."

Lenin thoroughly analysed the reasons for the superstitions held by the working people. He said that the toiler, tied to his plot of land, benighted, frightened and ignorant, was a victim of superstitions. But Lenin noted even in his early works that rationalism and distrust of the Gospel's commandments were growing in the peasantry. He said in a brochure "To the Rural Poor" that even at that time peasants did not believe the priests who tried their hardest arguing that serfdom had been approved by Holy Scripture and legalised by God. Lenin repeatedly pointed out that the peasants were level-headed business-minded people who demanded tangible material benefits. Proceeding from these propositions, the Bolsheviks conducted extensive educational work in the masses, exposing the autocracy's counter-revolutionary policies and those of the large army of priests serving it. Social-Democratic revolutionary leaflets and pamphlets contained a wealth of anti-religious material. They were a highly versatile, effective form of propaganda of communist ideas in the masses at that time. The League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class in St. Petersburg and the revolutionary Social-Democratic organisations in the Ukraine began issuing atheistic leaflets in great quantities as early as 1895 and

1896, and these activities were stepped up in the period 1902-1907. The leaflets and pamphlets exposed the class meaning of religion, its alliance with the autocracy and persecution of science and enlightenment and propagated freedom of conscience. Under the impact of this propaganda, and in the crucible of fierce class battle, despite Draconian laws to protect worship, the political awareness of the masses grew and many revolutionary workers and peasants broke with religion. Although people did not give up religion *en masse* until the October Revolution, an alliance of militant atheists was formed at that time under the proletarian Party's leadership. The Bolsheviks relied on this alliance after taking power to carry out their scientific policy as regards religion and the church.

Power in Russia was transferred to the workers and peasants in October, 1917. This action marked the beginning of a new historical era—an era of triumph for socialism and communism. By destroying the regime of the bourgeoisie and landowners and establishing the Soviet Republic of workers and peasants, the October Revolution dealt a crushing blow to the age-old illusions that the tsar's power came from God.

For centuries the exploiting classes instilled in the working people the myth of the divine, supernatural origin of any power. The workers, peasants and revolutionary soldiers destroyed courageously and resolutely the former attributes of power and demonstrated to the whole world that the proletarian state did not need religion as a tool to hold the masses in spiritual slavery. Having eliminated private ownership of land and established public ownership of the country's minerals, forests and means of production, Soviet power began removing the principal root of religion, that is the rule of capital in all its forms, thus creating requisites for the people giving up religion *en masse*. Lenin pointed out in his article "Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution" that, although freedom of conscience was an important problem for the bourgeoisie when they rose up against the feudals, they did not dare to carry it out because religion had helped the exploiters instill respect for the "sacred right of private property" in the oppressed for centuries.

The founders of scientific communism pointed out that a formal proclamation of democratic freedoms and disestablishment



of church alone would not solve the problem of liberating man from religious chains. In bourgeois society, Marx wrote, "political . . . emancipation . . . neither abolishes the *real* religiousness of man, nor strives to do so."<sup>1</sup> Relying on science, Soviet power from the very start began combating boldly and resolutely the church's age-old domination. "In not a *single* one of the most advanced countries in the world have *these* questions [religion, the denial of rights to women, etc.] been *completely* settled on *bourgeois-democratic* lines. . . . In our country they have been settled completely by the legislation of the October Revolution,"<sup>2</sup> Lenin wrote. The Soviet system was the first in history to grant extensive rights and freedoms to the formerly oppressed peoples in all spheres of social and public life, including the unrestricted right to freedom of conscience. In contrast to the bourgeoisie, which had opposed the church's domination at the dawn of the bourgeois revolutions and then, giving up combating religion, allied with it, the proletarian state does not need church's support and takes pains to enlighten the masses, helping them in overcoming religion.

"Bourgeois democracy", even in the most democratic of modern capitalist countries, does not go beyond recognising the equality of all religions before the law, the freedom to profess any faith, but not the right to atheism. In contrast to bourgeois society the socialist system provides greater democracy for working people in matters related to freedom of conscience, among others. The Soviet Union has not only freed people from "state privileges for one religion or another", but is also solving a more difficult problem—liberating the human conscience from "religious *ideas*", "the church" in general.<sup>3</sup>

By abolishing all national and national-religious privileges and disablements and proclaiming all faiths, customs, national and religious institutions to be free, the Soviet state ended the policy of putting people against each other and of using for the purpose religious and national strife. The lessons of the class

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question", in: Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

struggle in the course of the revolutionary break-up of the pillars of the old regime and the counter-revolutionary stance taken by clergymen of all the churches during the Civil War and foreign intervention stimulated the process of educating and changing attitudes to religion in the masses. During two revolutions and the Civil War, Russia's working classes obtained a thorough political education in a short period. Affected by the revolutionary upheaval, their mentality and consciousness underwent radical changes.

The revolutionary epoch was an important stage where workers and peasants began abandoning religion on a large scale. About 10 per cent of adults gave up religion during the first few years of Soviet rule. Although many people at that time still kept to some religious rituals to keep up the tradition, their former belief in God was shattered dramatically.

However, the Communist Party was aware how difficult it would be to overcome religious beliefs in the population at large. Even in the first few years of Soviet rule, this work called for careful and thorough study of the population's religious beliefs by local Party and state officials in order to determine future educational activities.

To help believers become atheists and involve them in an active and constructive life in building a new society were the targets of the Communist Party at all times in their programme for atheist education. Lenin's programme for atheist education was reflected in the documents adopted by the 12th Party Congress. It said that religious prejudices were still alive. "The religious prejudices, weakened and shattered by life, will retain the ground still for a long time to come," stressed the resolution of the Congress.

The proletariat was small in number in the outlying national areas of tsarist Russia. The local clergy took advantage of this fact when Soviet power was established by stepping up their activity. This led to the growth of Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic sentiments in the East and to the rise of Zionist groups in Western regions of the country. Because of this, the 12th Party Congress decided that atheist work among the believers of all denominations should be intensified. The Congress stressed that propaganda should be conducted regularly and scientifically,

using many methods. The Congress charged the local Party organisations with launching a more extensive propaganda drive through study groups, seminars, lectures, personal talks and in the press, by means of films and books on the subject. The Party Central Committee recommended that extreme care should be taken, especially while working with non-Russian peoples in the regions where religion and the clergy had greater historical influence and national and religious issues tended to be inseparable.

As directed by the Party Central Committee, sociological research was conducted in the 1920s and early 1930s to study processes in the minds of the masses and see how their attitude to religion was changing. The studies were to find out exactly for every territory or region where religious beliefs (Orthodoxy, Mohammedanism, sectarianism, paganism, etc.) still survived on a large scale; in what regions they were especially strong and in what stratum of the population (craftsmen, peasant-farmers, in woodlands, ethnic centres, etc.), where religious sentiments revived noticeably and why (because of backwardness, vigorous church activities, slack cultural work, material conditions worsened by poor harvest and so on). The sociological studies produced findings characterising the attitudes of different groups of the population to religion, the numerical strength of religious communities, and the number of religious ceremonies performed at places of worship by various denominations.

Most of the people continued to live in the countryside and still remained religious in the mid-1920s. But even at that time atheism increased with every new achievement of the socialist state. In Pskov Region (population 1,700,000), for example, 500,000 adults living mostly in towns did not belong to any religious association, neither Orthodox nor sectarian, at that time. Nearly two thirds of the inhabitants in Cherepovets no longer had regular connections with the church and were either atheists or waverers.

The revolutionary-proletarian part of the population, mainly in the cities and towns, was the carrier of atheism, as a rule. Thus, in Moscow people abandoned religion more rapidly in the areas around large factories. There were fewer registered religious ceremonies performed in these areas in Moscow in the mid-1920s than on the capital's outskirts. There were no exact

data but, considering that the Communist Party and Komsomol had a total of nearly 4 million members with unbelievers among non-Party workers, peasants and intellectuals and some of their family members all added to that number, quite a large figure can be obtained for the non-religious in that period.

The Communist Party directed propagandists to conduct a profound study of the reasons for people's continuing religious beliefs and demanded that they should keep track of the changes in people's attitudes to religion. The first results of the studies conducted by the Party organisations and scientific institutions made clear that atheism was spreading in the country. The spread of atheism was caused by the process of socialist construction.

On the basis of statistics and sociological findings, the People's Commissar of Education, A. V. Lunacharsky, concluded that about 20 per cent of the population had already given up religion by the late 1920s in the USSR and the rest remained believers or waverers.

The Party Central Committee took measures to step up educational work. Scientific centres on problems of atheism were set up in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, Voronezh and other cities. These centres made more than 100 sociological studies in various regions of the country in the 1920s and early 1930s to find out how greatly the population was still influenced by religion. Sociological research into the problems of liberation from religious prejudices was carried out by the Moscow Institute on Methods of Extra-School Activities, the Institute for Study of the Peoples of the USSR, the labour activities centre of the Moscow Regional Council of Trade Unions and by institutes under the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

In 1929 and 1930, people's religious beliefs were studied in Byelorussia, Moscow, Leningrad, in Tataria, in the Volga-Kama Area and in some areas of the Lower Volga Area and in Karelia. Research expeditions went to Magnitogorsk, to the construction site of a large dam on the Dnieper River and to some areas of the Central Black-Earth Zone. The researchers obtained valuable data on people's changing attitudes toward religion.

The extent of continuing religious belief in Byelorussia was investigated thoroughly in 1929 and 1930. Using techniques devised specifically for the purpose, the Byelorussian experts made

a survey of 20 cities and towns and 225 villages. 3,086 questionnaires were distributed. The answers provided the data which proved valid for many parts of the republic. 35.4 per cent of those polled said they did not believe in God, and 60 per cent of them were men.

Sponsored by the Philosophy Institute under the auspices of the Communist Academy, an All-Union conference of researchers engaged in problems of religion and scientific atheism was held in December 1930. Another such conference took place in 1934. The speakers told the audiences about radical transformations in the minds of the masses, emphasising that religious ideology is undergoing great changes in the USSR; the former stabilisation in the number of religious communities was giving way to its gradual decrease. This trend could be found not only in the Russian Orthodox Church, but also in sects in the late 1920s. At the same time, delegates to the conferences drew attention to tendencies toward renovation present in almost all denominations and to the efforts of the churchmen and sectarians to revive and establish some seemingly-forgotten rituals and customs.

Although breaking away from religious ideology was inexorable in the late 1920s and early 1930s, religious influence still remained considerable. In the RSFSR, for instance, Autonomous republics excluded, there were 36,805 religious associations as of January 1, 1928. Most of them (32,539) were functioning in the countryside and 4,266 in the cities and towns. In spite of a sharp decline, the USSR had 50 different sects with a total of 3.5 million members in the early 30s. There were still about nine million Old Believers. The Orthodox Church had 50,000 active places of worship throughout the country in 1929. The religious organisations had many clergymen and church activists. In addition, religious propaganda was conducted by thousands of former monks and nuns. In addition to preaching at places of worship, the religious centres of various denominations published journals, books and brochures. Thus, 100,000 copies of religious publications, 11 journals and other printed matter were distributed in the Ukraine in 1928 alone. The clergy's efforts could not however stop the mass departure from religious belief.

A significant indication of the decline in religiosity of the

population was the diminishing influence of the ceremonial aspect of worship. The number of rituals performed by Orthodox priests decreased everywhere at the turn of the 1920s, as did the number of baptisms by Baptists. The workers of the Znamya Oktyabrya factory in Byelorussia announced publicly that they would not observe religious holidays and urged all the working people to fight "for science, for a new and correct world-outlook, for a new order of things and a new way of life". The inhabitants of most villages in Leningrad Region refused to celebrate "patron saint's days" in 1929. Eight hundred collective farms were surveyed in the Central Black-Earth Zone in the spring sowing season in 1932 and it turned out that 75 per cent of the collective farmers worked on religious holidays. More than half of the peasants who had joined collective farms refused to celebrate religious holidays and rituals in 1934.

Time spent on worship in the countryside has also decreased considerably. In 1934, men took 4 hours and women 15 hours to perform religious rituals against 119 hours for men and 199 hours for women in 1922 and 1923. The desire for self-education and schooling increased at the same time.

The radical transformation of Soviet life during industrialisation and collectivisation, the involvement of the masses in the planned economic construction and the active participation of workers, peasants and working intelligentsia in fulfilling national economic plans all contributed to people giving up religion *en masse*. Clergymen themselves had to recognise this fact. A representative of the Mogilev Eparchial Board said at a conference of Orthodox priests held in Orsha in 1934: "Any close observer cannot help seeing the attitude of the younger generation to faith. . . . Atheism has deeply penetrated the minds of the common people; it is growing rapidly and getting stronger."

People abandoned religion on a large scale, a process that began after the October Revolution, and now progressed smoothly in the cities and in the countryside. About 70 per cent of the urban population and over 50 per cent of the collective farmers terminated regular connections with the church as early as the mid-1930s.

The triumph of socialist relations in town and country and the working people's active participation in building the new

society helped to release them increasingly from the influence of religion and the church. Atheism became widespread in the urban and rural areas in the late 1930s.

Most people gave up religion and the church due to the immense work carried out by the Communist Party. Many of those clergymen who had not believed in the humane principles of socialism during the early years of Soviet rule changed their attitudes and became loyal Soviet citizens. Only a small number of clergymen still fought against it.

The radical changes in people's minds and democratism of public life destroyed the social roots of religion in the USSR; religion and the church entered a deep crisis. Marx pointed out that this trend was inevitable under socialism. In an interview with a reporter from the *Chicago Tribune* he said that religion would disappear as socialism developed. It had to disappear as a result of the social development where education would play a great role.

The Communist Party organised atheist propaganda among believers, instructing its ideologists that the success of their work would depend on their ability to involve all the Soviet people, including those who were religious, in active construction of the new society. Participation in the social process was the best means to liberate believers from religion. While stressing the primary importance of revolutionary practice in overcoming religion, the Party cautioned against any underestimation of planned and purposeful atheistic activities.

This work was launched under the guidance of Party organisations just before the War. More books on atheism were published, more lectures and talks arranged. Training courses for propagandists of atheism were started in many places.

Fewer people abandoned religion during the War and the process was even reversed in some places. Bourgeois Sovietologists still try to picture this fact as proof that religion is alive in the minds of the Soviet people and that the CPSU and Soviet state have failed to make religious prejudices disappear. The false reasons to explain the temporary revival of religious beliefs are based on political motives to serve anti-communism.

The reasons for some revival of religious belief during the War are as follows:

First, the War brought unheard-of hardships, suffering, destruction and death to millions of people. Worry about the fate of the country, one's home, for the lives of one's family and relatives created the conditions for religious sentiments. Second, the churchmen and sectarians became more active. While praying for victory over Nazi Germany and urging people to help frontline soldiers, they sought at the same time to strengthen belief in God and to attract more people to religion, especially the grief-stricken. In their efforts, the clergy relied on their church's growing material and financial resources, stronger machinery, and greater capacity for training personnel and issuing a broad range of publications. Third, the Nazi invaders initially encouraged those churchmen and sectarians who were willing to collaborate, concealing their secret designs to ban entirely the traditional popular faiths in the occupied territories. Fourth, atheistic propaganda grew weaker during the War. The Union of Militant Atheists almost ceased to function and atheist newspapers and magazines were no longer published. Well-versed atheists gradually stopped active work and verbal propaganda work was cut down. Some artists and writers expressed the harmful opinion that religion and the church were neutral, even useful in socialist society.

The patriotism of believers and many clergymen displayed during the War and the praise given to activity by the religious centres were interpreted by some experts as a change in the attitude to religion. Freedom of conscience as guaranteed by the USSR Constitution came to be understood as unrestricted freedom of religious propaganda. The false theory that the victory of socialism in the USSR had totally destroyed the social roots of religion became popular. Leniency toward the churchmen who violated the Soviet legislation on worship developed. The reasons why religious prejudices were still alive were not discussed and their influence on certain groups of Soviet people and their ideological harm were underestimated.

There were objective reasons for the struggle against religious prejudices to be weakened, namely: the fact that the defeat of fascism spent a great deal of the people's physical and spiritual forces during the War. The Party organisations, state and public bodies pursued one goal: victory over Nazi Germany.



At the same time, it would be wrong to overestimate the influence of religion on Soviet people during the War. The Soviet people's fight against the Nazi invaders did not stop the process of turning away from religion. The just, national character of the War for the Soviet Union, a profound analysis of its causes made in the Marxist-Leninist spirit and the purposeful work of the Communist Party to mobilise the working people's efforts toward defeating the enemy all helped to strengthen further the Soviet people's belief in the humane principles of socialism and the correctness of the scientific-materialist world view. Only the rate at which people left religion was slowed down during the war years, but the decline in the influence of religion and the church still continued.

Despite the difficult situation, the Party Central Committee deemed necessary to propagate atheist views among believers, which is proved by its resolution adopted in 1944 "On Organisation of Scientific-Educational Propaganda".

While directing the communist education, the Party Central Committee repeatedly drew attention of the Party organisations to the fact that work on overcoming religious prejudices should be followed closely at all times. By its resolution "On the Work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia" dated January 25, 1947, it bound all the Party organisations in the Republic to work patiently with believers, exposing hostile activities by some Catholic ministers at that time. Guided by these directives, the local Party organisations took measures to step up their atheist activities. The All-Union *Znanie* Society made arrangements everywhere for lectures on atheistic and scientific subjects. The Society's Central Board and some local branches formed atheist sections and scientific-methodological councils for propagation of atheist knowledge. Close attention was given to natural sciences. Verbal and written propaganda focused on the Marxist-Leninist proposition that scientific and religious world views were incompatible, and the preaching of churchmen and sectarians contradicted scientific knowledge.

Nevertheless, this work was not up to the tasks set by the Party. Church organisations took advantage of weak atheist propaganda and stepped up their activity. Active preaching and charity work, individual handling of religious waverers and the emotional im-

pact of divine services led to an increase in the number of people observing religious rituals in some places. All sorts of fanatics resumed their illegal activities at "holy places". Religious holidays in certain populated areas were marked by drinking and violations of labour discipline under the pretext of celebrating religious rituals. All this interfered with conscientious, active economic and cultural construction.

On July 7, 1954 the CPSU Central Committee adopted a resolution "On Major Drawbacks in Scientific-Atheistic Propaganda and Measures to Improve It". The Central Committee demanded that all ideologists should activate their anti-religious work and launch an atheist drive to expose the reactionary essence of religion. It recommended that the best Party and Komsomol cadres, scholars and propagandists should be entrusted with this work. The Central Committee censured the system of working by spurts in the propaganda of atheist and scientific knowledge demanding that the anti-religious work should be carried on according to plans and use the personal approach method. To help the propagandists and to publicise the problems of scientific atheism, the Central Committee recommended that *Znanie* Society should publish a popular-science monthly magazine *Nauka i religiya* and charged the all-Union publishing houses to print more works by the founders of Marxism-Leninism on religion and atheism and relevant books by Russian and foreign classics. The resolution imposed on the Central Committee of the Young Communist League and the All-Union Central Trade Union Council the duty to devise and carry out a large number of measures to intensify the atheist education of working people.

Following this resolution, Party organisations, state and public bodies stepped up considerably their activities to overcome religious prejudice. An editorial entitled "Against Religious Prejudices" published in *Pravda* noted that "carrying out the directives of the CPSU Central Committee, Party organisations did some work to intensify the atheist education of the working people. It helped to liberate new groups of the population from the religious prison". Influenced by atheist propaganda, many believers and some clergymen broke with religion and became themselves involved in such propaganda. They included a for-

mer archpriest and professor in the Leningrad Theological Academy, Aleksandr Osipov, and a former Candidate of Theology and a teacher in a theological seminary, Evgraf Duluman, among others.

As directed by the CPSU Central Committee, measures were taken everywhere to expose and terminate activities by charlatans near the so-called holy places and diverse scientific-educational work with believers was conducted resulting in the formerly massive pilgrimage to the "holy places" dying down. Due to the current stampede of believers from religion, the sphere of church activities is becoming narrower each year.

The USSR is a country of mass atheism, as is shown by sociological studies although there is no recording people's belief or unbelief in the USSR. Only specific sociological studies can provide such data. They were stopped during and for some time after the War and resumed in the early 1960s.

The studies have shown that given complete freedom of conscience, religion is declining everywhere. The break of people with the belief in God on a large scale in socialist society is a result of radical changes in the Soviet people's life style, of their high social awareness and of the Communist Party's planned scientific-atheistic work among believers.

Believers' consciousness has also changed radically. Nowadays, Soviet people who are still religious more often than not are unaware of the meaning of their creed: they do not read the Bible, Koran or Talmud, and observe religious rites only to maintain tradition. There is even more evidence that religion has no roots and no future in the USSR. It is increasingly difficult for the church to attract youth who do not participate in religious ceremonies.

As a result of religion's weakening role in the lives of Soviet people, big religious processions have become a thing of the past, miracle-working icons and relics are no longer made on a large scale and sham healings of the sick and other display of religious fanaticism has stopped. "Miracles" of healing and imperishable relics of the church holy fathers are little spoken of from pulpits today. It would have seemed ridiculous today even to believers, and so the modern clergy has to be versatile and flexible in order to fuel the dying religious flame.

Sociological studies brought about a lot of diverse data characterising religion's influence on different strata of the population. They have shown that the process of people leaving religion, which began during the first years of Soviet rule, continues steadily but its progress is not the same everywhere. The church still maintains its grip on badly-educated elderly people, mainly women. Regular church-goers include those who are not engaged in social production, pensioners and housewives. Out of 1,102 believers polled in Ivano-Frankovsk, Odessa, Sumy, Ternopol and Chernigov regions, 40 per cent do not work at a factory or on a farm. Skilled industrial workers account for 8.6 per cent, operators of farm machinery for 3.2 per cent and office employees for 2.62 per cent.

All the studies have shown that the number of believers with secondary education is relatively small and those with higher education extremely rare. For example, 76.6 per cent of Baptists in Byelorussia are badly-educated or illiterate persons, as are 77 per cent of the Baptists in Alma-Ata.

Scientists ascertained that the following factors hamper the process of believers giving up religion: differences between mental and manual labour and between low-skilled and high-skilled labour, differences in cultural and educational standards, non-participation of some groups of people, especially women, in active public and political life, and weak participation by retired people in public activities.

Interesting research has been made in Voronezh Region by M. K. Teplyakov and his associates. The population there is known to have been especially religious before the 1917 Revolution. The Region had 1,169 Orthodox places of worship and 14 monasteries and convents where divine service was celebrated by 5,000 priests and deacons and about 3,000 monks and nuns. A high percentage of religious people still remained during the first post-revolutionary years. Along with Orthodoxy, many sectarian groups existed there, some of them very active. Selective studies found that the countryside was 90 per cent religious even in the mid-1920s. But the mentality of the Voronezh people has radically changed during 60-odd years of Soviet power. The studies carried out in 6 towns, two workers' settlements and 127 villages, using special techniques, covered 60,000 peo-

ple. Officials of the region, city and district Party committees, secretaries of the executive committees of the Soviets of People's Deputies, and Komsomol activists helped with the research as did thousands of trained instructors and pollsters: teachers, students and activists of *Znanie* Society. The bulk of the Region's population was found to be non-religious. 49,978 (77.6 per cent) of the total of 59,288 polled said that they did not believe in God. Only 7.9 per cent of all adults in the Region proved to be deeply pious and 7.2 per cent were undecided.

Out of the total of non-religious persons residing in the city of Voronezh and Voronezh Region, 35,575 (77.3 per cent) said "No" when asked if they had ever been religious and 10,403 (22.6 per cent) stated that they had believed in God, but left religion during the years of Soviet power.

Thirteen thousand families with a total of 30,000 members were surveyed in the town of Shuya. Of these, 10 per cent were found to be religious and only 2 per cent deeply pious.

Believers make up 3-5 per cent of those working and about 10 per cent of those who do not work (retired, disabled and housewives) in Leningrad and Leningrad Region.

Social inactivity is one of the reasons that part of the population still remains religious. Finding himself isolated, socially inactive person feels lonely and useless and often attracts churchmen or sectarians trying to win him round. Sociological studies have shown that a very small number of people maintain religious traditions and perform religious rituals among those working, particularly at large enterprises where political and propaganda work is well-organised in the masses. On the contrary, the percentage of believers is still high among the pensioners, invalids, housewives and persons who work at small enterprises and in public services.

The percentage of religious women is still high. There are many widows among them—a result of the last War—and unmarried mothers who have to carry the burden of bringing up their children. Many women do not participate in the life of the community. Believers in Belgorod Region, who go to church or to prayers in sects, for instance, are 80 per cent women. They account for 78-80 per cent of Orthodox adherents and 84.4 per cent of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Gorky.

The rural population is more religious than city dwellers for several reasons, in particular because of their historical, social and cultural background. This has been confirmed by specific sociological studies made in some regions of the RSFSR, in the republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, the Northern Caucasus, Tataria, Bashkiria and Azerbaijan. But religion affects different groups of farmers to a different degree. There are more religious persons among those who live in small localities, such as auls in the mountains, kishlaks near the desert and in isolated farmsteads far from cultural centres.

The carriers of religious beliefs in the village are primarily labourers, aged men and women engaged in domestic chores who are cut off from public activities. The overwhelming majority of operators of farm machinery, best farmers, and people with higher or secondary education have long forgotten about religious prejudices and are convinced atheists. Thus at state farms of Kustanai Region where 96 per cent of the work force are skilled workers and machine operators, only 4.6 per cent of those polled said they believed in God. Believers make up 13.4 per cent of the men engaged in various jobs at collective farms of Orel Region, but only 3.9 per cent of farm machinery operators.

The overwhelming majority of believers are honest Soviet people who have lost touch with social production due to old age or other circumstances. This has been shown by all studies, including those made recently in Ivano-Frankovsk, Odessa, Sumy, Ternopol and Chernovtsy regions in the Ukraine.

Leningrad sociologists studied 12 professional groups of intellectuals (white-collar workers, doctors and teachers, as well as writers, journalists, artists and actors). An overwhelming majority of the intelligentsia was found to have scientific, materialist views and to agree with the policies of the Communist Party and Soviet state to overcome religious prejudices. The 12 groups included 1,000 professionals. Only 9 persons (less than 1 per cent) could be referred to as believers or as hesitant about faith.

Such studies made in some regions of the country totally refute assertions by bourgeois propaganda that a religious revival is taking place in the USSR among the intelligentsia. On the contrary, as the studies have demonstrated, many intellectuals parti-

cipate actively in scientific-atheist propaganda and help the Party combat religion ideologically.

As was mentioned above, the believers are mainly aged men and women. Young people make up a negligible percentage of those who regularly attend places of worship. This fact indicates that the resources drawing new believers into religion are steadily dwindling.

Religious views are alien to the absolute majority of Soviet youth. Recent sociological studies of the young, including those of school age, reveal that the degree of religiosity in that bracket dropped more than five-fold compared with the 1920s and 1930s. 1,619 pupils of grades 8-10 polled in 28 Leningrad schools had 24 believers (1.5 per cent) and 34 (2.4 per cent) said they were hesitant about faith. A survey of 800 youths in Odessa and Odessa Region confirmed that only 20 of them (2.5 per cent) were religious.

5.5 per cent of the rural population in the 16-30 age bracket of Orel Region are believers. They are mostly girls from religious families. Girls are known to maintain closer ties with their families and, especially, with women (mother or grandmother) whose religiosity in general is higher than that of men.

There were three believers of young or middle age for ten elderly ones during the early years of Soviet rule, whereas today, the ratio is 1:10. At the same time, it would be a mistake to underestimate atheistic education of youth on these grounds. There are still cases of an unprincipled attitude toward religion both among rural and urban young people when they use religious paraphernalia for ornaments and participate in religious ceremonies for reasons that have nothing to do with religious convictions.

The social roots of religion have been shattered in the USSR but the sources for reproduction of religion still remain. One must remember that religious preachers nowadays put their hopes for the future upon "reproduction of religiosity" in the young generation.

Family has been a channel for handing down religiosity. Family traditions and feverish recruitment work of religious preachers and church activists are not the only reasons, of course, for religiosity still being alive. Vestiges of the old style of life still

survive in some spheres, especially in the countryside. Negligence in scientific-atheist work also plays a role.

One cannot treat today the notion of "believer" as a stereotype. As studies have demonstrated, the number of convinced believers is steadily declining. There are many people among parishioners whose religiosity is reduced to irregular attendance of their places of worship.

Ceremonies are the most tenacious and conservative parts of the Orthodox creed. But today children are often baptised and burial services performed for non-religious motives.

Sometimes, people who never turn to religion in their daily life behave as if they were religious. They do not go to church or mosque and do not believe in religious dogma, but they compromise and arrange for baptism, burial service or marriage in church when a child is born or family members marry or die. The findings of study made at the Ernst Thaelmann Factory in Moscow are typical. Only 8.6 per cent of the workers there who had baptised their children had done so because of their religious views. The rest said they had taken such a step at the urging of their relatives (37 per cent), or in order to mark the birth of the child with a solemn ceremony (6.8 per cent), or did not want to break with tradition (39.6 per cent), or "just in case" (8 per cent). In Voronezh Region, too, only 5-8 per cent of the parents who had baptised their children had performed this ceremony because of their religious views.

Attendance of public prayers is another indication of the decline in religious belief. Many believers go to church only on major religious holidays, which is especially typical of urban communities. Attendance at places of worship is diminishing all the time. Of course, a person may be religious but not go to church. There are many cases when deeply pious people do not attend public prayers and celebrate religious ceremonies at home and, on the contrary, unbelievers may turn up by chance or intentionally at a place of worship on the most popular religious holiday. But there is no doubt that Easter for an Orthodox or Catholic believer or Uraza-Bairam and the preceding fast for Moslems are the periods in the life of believers when their attitude toward their religion is manifested best of all. It is then that more prayers are read and more rites are celebrated and



the clergy and ordinary believers are more active. However, sociological studies have found that even on the most popular religious holidays no more than 6-8 per cent of adults attend Orthodox churches or mosques.

All this reflects a profound crisis in all religions in the USSR. The spread of unbelief and the establishment of the scientific materialist world-outlook is convincing proof of this crisis.

The time when religion in a village was the ideological hub of life has long become a thing of the past. The style of life and culture of urban and rural workers today has changed so much for the better that even their pre-war level looks very low now, although great progress was evident even at that time compared with the period before October 1917.

Most of the Soviet population have shaken off religious prejudices completely.

Ordinary religious consciousness has been transformed radically. Many modern believers combine scientific materialist views of nature and society in their minds with adherence to old religious traditions and belief in God. Even theologians have to admit that perception of God, the next life in the beyond, and other religious tenets moved into the background in believers' minds. The idea of a new socio-political life and the struggle for it, theologians say, has become the central idea of modern times. It is there that most of the strength of the nation in general and of the believers in particular is spent.

Present-day believers in the USSR are affected not so much by the sources of religious information (sermons of clergymen and religious literature) as by non-religious sources. Thus 83.9 per cent of believers listen to the radio, 75.3 per cent watch TV, 10.6 to 23.2 per cent go to places of entertainment, 8.9 to 14.7 per cent see films and 2.9 to 8.9 per cent read books.

Under the impact of a flood of scientific information and changing conditions in life and work, believers have freed themselves from the burden of obsolete religious perception, which leads to a gradual decline in faith and a final break with it. The immense changes in the economy, culture and spiritual life of Soviet people over the last 30 or 40 years have reduced the religious adherence of the Soviet population by a factor of 4 or 5 and the percentage of the young (14 to 30 years old)

among the believers has dropped tenfold for the same period. This is an indication of the increased atheistic influence of Soviet schooling and of the entire educational system. The percentages of families where religious instruction is given decreased by a factor of four.

Recent research into the religious adherence of the population and the development of the atheist movement has demonstrated that no more than 8-10 per cent of adults are now active believers. This percentage may fluctuate in different regions of the country depending on actual conditions there but it is an indisputable fact that the mass-scale adherence to religion has been overcome in the Soviet Union since the Revolution. About 90 per cent of the population has broken off with religion for good.

Socialist society is a society of mass atheism. As a result of the profound changes in socio-economic conditions, elimination of the exploitative classes and the triumph of socialism, as a result of the successful development of science and of the general growth of the country's cultural standards, most of the population in the Soviet Union have long freed themselves from vestiges of religion.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE TRIUMPH OF FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE IN THE USSR

#### *Bourgeois and Socialist Concepts of Freedom of Conscience*

The issue of freedom of conscience and of putting this democratic principle into effect cannot be regarded in the abstract. There are two concepts of freedom of conscience: one is bourgeois, the other socialist. The bourgeois concept does not differ in essence from the one traditionally expounded by the church. Bourgeois ideologists regard freedom of conscience as man's attitude toward God, thus reducing it to a choice between religions and types of worship. And although the demands for freedom of conscience, separation of church from state and school from church, to stop persecution for religious convictions and to grant equal rights to all regardless of belief or unbelief had been advanced by the bourgeoisie as it fought against feudalism, it gave up these demands when in power because religion was needed to spiritually enslave the masses.

Having proclaimed freedom of conscience and separation of church from state and school from church in principle, the bourgeoisie never put these propositions into practice anywhere. After seizing power it supported the church in fighting atheists. Even today the disestablishment of the church in some capitalist countries is only used as a cover to protect religion against atheism and provide freedom for the exploitative classes to manoeuvre as atheism steadily increases and various religions raise their discordant voices. Church is a part of the state machinery *de facto* and sometimes even *de jure* in many capitalist countries. The state provides financial support to the church and uses it for its class interests.

The constitutions of many capitalist countries establish advantages for one religion while restricting others. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the official religion in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The Greek government supports the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Church of England dominates in Great Britain. Roman Catholicism is the established church in Spain. This recognition of an official status for one nomination in itself puts the other faiths and atheism into an unequal position. Nevertheless, this state of affairs is common in modern world. The special status of Islam is formalised by law in 17 countries of the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa, and the constitutions of 14 European and Latin American countries set out advantages for the Roman Catholic Church. Only a member of the established church can become head of state in 22 bourgeois countries. Argentina, Liberia and Iran also make this requirement for other official positions. What is the point of freedom of conscience when, for example, Catholics in Northern Ireland are discriminated against politically and Protestant extremists have declared an open war on them, supported by the ruling circles of Britain?

Conversely, Protestants were cruelly persecuted in Catholic Spain. They were not employed by government agencies or allowed to teach at schools or promoted to officer's rank in the army.

Although freedom of conscience and disestablishment of the church have been formally declared in the United States, many government institutions are still consecrated by religion or by celebration of religious rites. Sessions of Congress, for instance, are opened with prayers. When government officials and even the President take office, they have to take a religious oath. The preambles of the constitutions in 42 states contain appeals to God. Courts in some states do not recognise testimony given by atheist witnesses. Atheists cannot be appointed to the government staff. The constitution of the State of Delaware binds all the citizens to attend public prayers.

Freedom of conscience is still understood in capitalist countries today only as freedom of worship, i.e. as freedom of choice of religion, and even that choice is denied in many places.

Current legislation in many capitalist countries binds even

atheist parents to bring up their children in a religious spirit. The constitution of Norway, for example, demands that all citizens should educate their children in the spirit of the established Evangelical Lutheran Church. In West Germany, the church owns many children's institutions and schools. Confessional schools in some Lands, for example, in Bavaria, make up 96 per cent of all the schools. Catholic and Protestant religions run two-thirds of the primary (6-year) and many secondary schools in Holland. Greek law requires that teaching in secondary and primary schools is aimed at shaping national identity along the lines of the "ideological principles of Greek Christian culture". Israel has a state council for religious instruction and Judaism is recognised as the official religion.

A scandal that broke out in the British Parliament in late 1975 and a noisy campaign launched by the so-called free press are good illustrations of the bourgeois approach to freedom of conscience, freedom of speech and of the press. The outcry was caused by an open letter written by Dr. Mervyn Stockwood, the Bishop of Southwark, printed in the *Morning Star*, the British communist newspaper, in response to the Archbishop of Canterbury's pastoral letter published in the *Sunday Times*. The Archbishop appealed to all Englishmen "to renew in people a sense of moral purpose" in Great Britain because violence, hooliganism, drug-addiction and alcoholism were growing rife in the country. Answering the pastoral appeal and the *Sunday Times*, Dr. Mervyn Stockwood said that man's character is largely shaped by his environment and the social and economic conditions of his life. "An economic system which is based on selfishness and greed and which leads to class divisions, injustice and unemployment is bound to produce social chaos," Dr. Stockwood wrote. The Bishop admitted that all those who had visited the USSR and socialist countries in recent years could see for themselves that socialist society had done away forever with the vices that plague Britain. Although the Bishop of Southwark is one of the top dignitaries in the Church of England, his honest and truthful statement produced an outrage of those who saw his views as an infringement on "the established order". When told about the bishop's letter, Peter Rost, a Conservative MP in the House of Commons, hastened

to promise that he would request Dr. Stockwood's resignation in the House of Commons. "I say to him for God's sake—go," said Robert Adley, another Tory. The bourgeois press, so boastful of their freedom of opinion, began badgering the Bishop. The ruling classes were especially angry that Dr. Stockwood had said that the Soviet Union and other socialist countries grant more freedom and ensure more favourable conditions for their citizens' development than Britain does. "He let the side down badly not just in England but throughout the world for expressing his views in a Communist newspaper," fumed Tory MP John Stokes. The Bishop was accused of seeing "the roots of vice" in the very structure of society and, particularly, because he had set the socialist countries as an example. This is what freedom of speech and conscience mean in modern Britain. It proves again how correct the Marxist evaluation of bourgeois democracy really is. All bourgeois freedoms are utterly false, said Lenin, and only serve to mask capitalist deception, coercion and exploitation.<sup>1</sup>

The founders of Marxism-Leninism exposed the hypocrisy of the bourgeois law, and stressed that the bourgeois concept of freedom of conscience was only formal. There is not a single capitalist country whose constitution would guarantee, while proclaiming freedom of worship, the right of citizens not to believe in God and inadmissibility of discrimination against atheists. Communists have always been against such one-sided interpretation of freedom of conscience and against any restrictions in matters of belief or unbelief.

The classics of Marxism-Leninism have thoroughly substantiated the need for freedom of conscience to include the freedom not to recognise any religion and the right to freedom of atheistic propaganda in addition to freedom to believe in God. The point is that complete freedom of conscience is assured only where the law guarantees freedom for citizens to be atheists and provides opportunities for them to carry on atheistic propaganda, along with freedom for believers to satisfy their religious needs.

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "From the First Subbotnik on the Moscow-Kazan Railway to the All-Russia May Day Subbotnik", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, p. 124.

Communists proclaim and guarantee freedom of worship, but they do not limit their concept of freedom of conscience to religious freedom alone. The Marxist-Leninist concept of freedom of conscience is a thorough use of scientific achievements for the purpose of liberating people's minds from religion. Religion continues to be a powerful tool for spiritually oppressing the working people. The individualistic attitudes based on religious ideas of personal salvation and of a God-chosen nation that have been instilled for centuries, and the mistaken interpretation of the life's meaning have held the masses in darkness and ignorance. The socialist system and the implementation of a genuine freedom of conscience in the USSR and other socialist countries have provided access to scientific knowledge and cultural achievements for the working people.

Real, unrestricted freedom of conscience helps to educate the broad masses of working people to respect man and his dignity regardless of his religion, and to awaken interest in the spiritual values of other nations. It promotes the desire for international communication and strengthens friendship among nations.

*Man's Spiritual Emancipation and the Shaping of the Materialist World-Outlook*

In contrast to the capitalist countries, Soviet legislation protects the right to freedom of conscience for both believers and atheists. While granting broad rights to believers to satisfy their religious needs, the socialist state enables non-believers to carry on regular atheist propaganda, either individually or in scientific and educational societies without offending the religious sensibilities of believers. The bourgeois concept of freedom of conscience has never risen to the level of unqualified recognition of such needs. In Lenin's words, the socio-economic meaning of freedom of conscience in capitalist countries consists in the "freedom for capital to buy or bribe whole church organisations for the purpose of doping the masses with the opium of religion"<sup>1</sup>. A genuine, unrestricted freedom of conscience can exist only in a country where the social order based on eco-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Draft (or Theses) of the R.C.P.'s Reply to the Letter of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 339.

nomic and spiritual oppression of the working masses has been abolished. The USSR is the first country to have done away forever with the spiritual oppression of the popular masses.

The Great October Socialist Revolution has affected all aspects of human life, including the development of the masses' atheistic world-outlook. The victory of socialism in the USSR has proven the truth of the Marxist-Leninist teaching on religion's transient nature and ways of overcoming it. Most of the Soviet population are free of religious prejudices. The new generation has never known the influence of religion. The experience of the USSR has shown that the break with religion *en masse* under socialism was caused by radical changes in the social structure of society, by elimination of the exploitative classes, and organisation of entire life on a scientific basis.

The multinational Soviet state, where economic and cultural backwardness has been eradicated for good, sets an example of how people can live together in equality and brotherhood. The tremendous accomplishments of the USSR in science, technology and culture attest to the might of the socialist system and its superiority over capitalism. The fraternal unity of Soviet nations was made possible by the leadership and guidance of the Communist Party which carries out a consistent Leninist policy of friendship among the peoples. All Soviet people, believers and atheists alike, are equal citizens of their socialist country. Inspired by great goals, they selflessly work toward building communism and support the domestic and foreign policies of the Communist Party and Soviet government.

Enjoying the benefits of the Soviet way of life, believers, just like all other citizens in the Soviet Union, continue to feel the salutary effects of the tremendous progress in the sphere of socio-political reforms and the advance of science and culture. They have common interests with all Soviet people and participate in communist construction.

The CPSU shows constant concern for the Soviet people's growth of welfare and improvement in spiritual culture. The overcoming of religious prejudices is a vital precondition for shaping the communist world-outlook of the working people. "*The formation of a communist world outlook in the broad masses of the people,*" said the Report of the CPSU Central Com-



mittee to the 24th Party Congress, "and their education in the spirit of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism are the core of all ideological and educational work by the Party."<sup>1</sup>

### *The Ways of Overcoming Religious Prejudices*

A new man is being formed during daily creative activities by socialist society's workers. Comprehensive socio-political and educational measures are directed toward this goal. The atheist education of the working people has been and still is an important field of ideological work. Although religion in the USSR has been ousted from the main, decisive spheres of public life and most Soviet people have freed themselves from religious convictions, one cannot ignore the ideological harm of religion, because some Soviet people are still under the influence of religious ideology.

This ideology goes back into the distant past. Its roots are to be found in the backwardness and ignorance of the bulk of workers and peasants. The ruling classes of old Russia relied on the church to hold the masses in such a state for centuries. According to 1897 census, the population (within present-day borders) was 70.4 per cent illiterate in what is now the RSFSR. Georgia was 76.4 per cent illiterate, Uzbekistan—96.4 per cent, Kirghizia—96.9 per cent and Tajikistan—97.7 per cent. Forty-eight ethnic groups even had no alphabet of their own before the Revolution.

Because of this, Lenin soon after the Soviets had taken power taught the Communists to combat religious prejudices by means of propaganda and education of the masses. "The deepest source of religious prejudice," he said, "is poverty and ignorance; and that is the evil we have to combat."<sup>2</sup> That is why the Communist Party linked the task of overcoming religious prejudices to an upswing in the material and cultural standard of living.

Having separated church from state and school from church, the socialist state ensured an unheard-of pace of improvement

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<sup>1</sup> 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, March 30-April 9, 1971. Documents, Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow, 1971, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech at the First All-Russia Congress of Working Women. November 19, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 181.

in the masses' culture and education during the lifetime of just one generation. While the enrolment of all general education schools in tsarist Russia of 1914 and 1915 was 9,656,000, in September 1976, 46,468,000 pupils attended Soviet schools. In addition, 4,950,000 students are enrolled in 859 higher education establishments. By providing education free of charge at all levels and paying scholarships to students, Soviet power made education accessible for the working people. The Soviet Union now has the largest army of skilled workers, collective farmers, experienced engineers and technicians, agronomists and livestock experts, business managers and scientists. As of 1977, there were 780 people who had a secondary (complete and incomplete) and higher education for every 1,000 people engaged in the national economy. In developed socialist society, the mass media, such as the press, radio and television, have been greatly improved, more books, magazines and newspapers are being published. All this helps to raise Soviet people's culture, to shape their scientific-materialist world-outlook, and to overcome religious prejudices.

One can sometimes come across ridiculous statements in the bourgeois "free press" that the CPSU formulated a demand for forceful eradication of religion and the believers in its Programme. But Communists have always rejected and resolutely condemned any highhanded methods in combating religion, as well as pseudo-revolutionary demands by anarchists that it should be banned. The founder of the Communist Party and the Soviet state, Lenin advised that "we must be extremely careful in fighting religious prejudices; some people cause a lot of harm in this struggle by offending religious feelings."<sup>1</sup>

In overcoming religion, he said, one should not forget that church ideology permeates the everyday life of not only peasants but also of great masses of urban proletariat. Therefore, Lenin pointed out, the Communists were faced with a gigantic struggle, long, persistent, careful and unremitting. He taught Communists "to combat the religious fog with purely ideological and solely ideological weapons, by means of our press and by word of

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech at the First All-Russia Congress of Working Women. November 19, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 181.

mouth.”<sup>1</sup> He felt that an administrative pressure in matters of worship would achieve nothing and can only “prevent it [religion—*Ed.*] from really dying out.”<sup>2</sup>

Consistently following Lenin’s directives, the CPSU has formulated democratic and humane principles for combating religious prejudices in its Programme. It says: “The Party uses ideological media to educate people in the spirit of a scientific materialist world conception, to overcome religious prejudices without insulting the sentiments of believers. It is necessary to conduct regularly broad atheistic propaganda on a scientific basis, to explain patiently the untenability of religious beliefs, which were engendered in the past when people were overawed by the elemental forces and social oppression and did not know the real causes of natural and social phenomena.”<sup>3</sup> The Programme emphasises that in this work one must use the achievement of modern science, which is steadily solving the mysteries of the universe and extending man’s power over nature, leaving no room for religious inventions about supernatural forces.

CPSU Programme propositions proceed from the thesis that religion is anti-scientific in its very nature, that it dulls believers’ social sentiments and reduces their social awareness. The clergy tries to persuade believers that happiness on earth is illusory and temporary and real happiness cannot be found in this life. They cultivate in the believers individualism, passivity and indifference to public life. That is why what Frederick Engels said in his time is still prophetically true: “A person who makes his whole being, his whole life, a preparation for heaven cannot have the interest in earthly affairs which the state demands from its citizens.”<sup>4</sup>

Proceeding from the demands of its Programme, the CPSU lately concentrates its atheist work more on criticism of religion

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Socialism and Religion”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, pp. 85-86.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, “The Attitude of the Workers’ Party to Religion”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 403.

<sup>3</sup> *The Road to Communism*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1962, p. 568.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Engels, “Frederick William IV, King of Prussia”, in: Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 363.

in terms of philosophy and natural sciences and on providing help to people still affected by religious prejudices to convert to the materialist world-outlook. Emphasis is laid on dissemination of scientific knowledge explaining natural phenomena and laws governing society and human life. Atheist propaganda is conducted not only strictly scientifically but also in a popularised form. At the same time, lecturers and propagandists, while taking care to set forth the atheistic ideas profoundly and in a popularised form, seek to avoid simplification and vulgarisation when working with believers. Marxism-Leninism requires that any offence to religious feelings of the believers should be avoided.

The overcoming of religion is not an end in itself but a necessary step in converting a person to a really scientific world-outlook. The Communist Party sees the value of atheism in that it directly forms the communist world-outlook. As the Communists see it, scientific atheism is not simply an unbelief in God. It does not boil down to a denial of religion alone because the exposure of the untenability of religious views and of the illusory nature and harm of religion does not solve the main problem—that of giving a person the scientific dialectic-materialist world-outlook. The Communist Party directs ideologists toward shaping scientific-materialist views in the minds of all Soviet people, believers and unbelievers alike, toward establishing values unconnected with religion, materialistic concepts of the world and Man and communist moral standards. The goal of scientific atheism is to try patiently and persistently to convert atheist knowledge into atheistic convictions. This is the essence and basic meaning of Marxist-Leninist atheism.

Atheist propaganda in the modern world calls for broader elucidation of religion's role in history. It is well-known that the churchmen lately take great efforts to picture religion and the church as champions of spiritual progress of nations. The atheists, therefore, are faced with the task of explaining the historical facts scientifically and revealing the real meaning of religion and its ideology as alien to science, to the ideas of socialism and communism.

Atheist propaganda on a scientific basis is designed to help increase the working people's activity. Lenin warned atheists

against aiming at only enlightening people in overcoming religion. He held that "the combating of religion cannot be confined to abstract ideological preaching, and it must not be reduced to such preaching."<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as the struggle against religious ideology is part of the more general struggle for communist transformation of society, Lenin recommended that this work should be bound up with actual practice of fighting for communism and for a better life. It is carried on in the USSR so that a believer sees an atheist as a close friend wishing him well. That is why atheist work is closely linked to other fields of activities by the Party and public organisations and by ideological institutions and agencies.

Atheist work helps to develop to the utmost the working people's creative initiative and activity and to emancipate spiritually those few Soviet people who are still influenced by religious ideology. It is combined with tact and consideration toward believers, who are for the most part honest workers in socialist society.

The CPSU repeatedly pointed out that any simplified approach to the work on overcoming religious prejudices was inadmissible. Immediately after Soviet power had been established a new Party Programme, adopted by the 8th Congress with a direct participation of Lenin, clearly formulated the fundamental line of the Party with respect to religion and the church during the building of socialist society. The 8th Congress of the RCP(B) confirmed in the new Programme the thesis approved by the 2nd Congress that church should be separated from state and school from church and emphasised that to combat religion and the church successfully was possible only along the lines of the socialist transformation of society and involving the believers into effective production and socio-political activities. The Party recommended that religion should be combated by propaganda and patient explanations. The Programme also pointed out that scientific-educational propaganda should help liberate the working masses from religious ideology. The Communist Party at that time attached a special importance to totally breaking the ties between the exploitative classes and re-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 405.

ligion. To break those ties in practice was to deprive hostile elements of the opportunity to use the church as a political and ideological weapon against Soviet power. On the other hand it was necessary to help believers by persuasion and atheist propaganda, to understand the class essence of religion. The Programme stressed that the main method for combating religious prejudices still was involving broad masses of working people into active construction of the new life. "The Party seeks to destroy completely the connection between the exploitative classes and organisation of religious propaganda," the Programme said, "promoting actual liberation of the toiling masses from religious prejudices and organising the widest possible scientific-educational and anti-religious propaganda." The Party was especially concerned for devising a policy toward the peoples of outlying national areas, oppressed in the past.

The Communist Party and Lenin set an example of a careful attitude to customs and traditions of the peoples who had professed Islam in the past. Lenin said in his Report on the Party Programme on March 19, 1919 at the 8th Party Congress that a specially careful handling was required "in relation to such peoples as the Kirghiz, the Uzbeks, the Tajiks, the Turkmen, who to this day are under the influence of their mullahs."<sup>1</sup> He advised against any haste and said: "we have to wait until the given nation develops, until the differentiation of the proletariat from the bourgeois elements, which is inevitable, has taken place."<sup>2</sup> As for the peoples formerly oppressed by tsarism, Lenin thought it of paramount importance to win their confidence, "to win it over again and again; to *prove* that we are *not* imperialists, that we shall *not* tolerate any *deviation* in that direction."<sup>3</sup>

He stressed the same idea in his telegram to G. K. Orjonikidze: "Again urge you to display caution and maximum good will towards the Moslems. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B). March 18-23, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "To A. A. Joffe", *Collected Works*, Vol. 45, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 298.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Telegram to G. K. Orjonikidze", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 494.

The Party Programme adopted by the 8th Congress states: "It is necessary to avoid carefully any offending of feelings of the believers as it leads only to religious fanaticism being strengthened."

The Communist Party and Lenin personally always spoke out resolutely against any anarchic methods of combating religion, considering it inadmissible to hurt believers' feelings even when simply criticising religious views. The Party called for consideration and respect toward the believers and directed its wonders toward long-range scientific-educational work and involving believers into effective production and socio-political activities.

Mistakes are possible in such a complex and subtle undertaking as the overcoming of religious prejudices. Individual local officials sometimes went to Leftist extremes like closing Orthodox and Catholic churches, mosques or synagogues, and taking away church bells. Such actions, however, have nothing to do with the Leninist policy toward religion, or Party methods of combating religious ideology. The Party has always condemned such methods in combating religion.

When places of worship began to be closed down on a large scale in some areas of the country at the beginning of the reconstruction period, the Central Committee of the RCP(B) sent a directive to the local authorities on May 15, 1923 with a request to investigate each case when a church had been closed down and to punish those responsible if the church had been closed down in violation of the legislation on worship. The letter ordered that the closures of churches be stopped. A duty was imposed on local Party offices to suggest that the gubernia executive committees of Soviets should reconsider the matter and to hand the churches expropriated in violation of the law back to the believers if the latter so requested. It was pointed out that the authorities should handle believers' complaints when their churches had been closed down with utmost consideration.

Another circular sent out by the Central Party Committee on June 1923 said: "Despite a number of directives from the Central Committee that religious prejudices of the peasantry and of a backward part of workers should be treated as care-

fully as possible, information continues to come to the CC from the country about facts that run counter to these directives, particularly about churches being closed down, that cause certain discontent and are used in every way possible by anti-Soviet elements." The letter went on to say: "The CC orders you to stop this measure being carried out and to give directives to the state authorities that the complaints of the population concerning the closures of churches should be treated with the greatest possible consideration." It was explained that even if a part of the population were annoyed by their church being closed down, the latter should be reopened and the persons guilty of this distortion of the Party's policy be punished.

The Central Party Committee has always condemned Leftist extremes such as the illegal closures of churches. Its resolution dated March 14, 1930 "On the Struggle Against Distortions of the Party Line in the Collective-Farm Movement" stated: "The practice of churches being closed down administratively under the fictitious pretext of voluntary desire of the public must be definitely *stopped*. A church *may be allowed* to be closed down only in case an overwhelming majority of the peasants really so desire and, at all events, if the appropriate resolutions of the peasant assemblies are endorsed by the regional executive committees. The persons guilty of insulting or mockery of religious feelings of peasant men and women should be severely punished." The resolution emphasised that, undoubtedly, such practices carried on under the flag of "Leftist rhetoric... have nothing to do with the policy of our Party".

Certain facts of high-handed actions with respect to the church were severely censured by a resolution of the CPSU Central Committee entitled "On Mistakes in Conducting Atheistic Propaganda Among the Population", adopted on November 10, 1954. The CPSU Central Committee charged all the Party organisations "to eliminate resolutely the mistakes in atheistic propaganda and not to allow in future, on any account, any offence to feelings of believers and clergymen, as well as administrative interference in the church activities. It is necessary to bear in mind that insulting actions with respect to the church, the clergy and religious citizens are incompatible with the course of the Party and the state in atheistic propaganda and run



against the USSR Constitution which grants freedom of conscience to Soviet citizens."

The Party holds that the drawbacks and errors in atheistic work breed distrust to the policy of the Soviet state toward religion and the believers and make further rallying of Soviet people more difficult. The division of working people according to their religions would benefit only the enemies of socialism who are taking pains today to stir up religious strife among nations, try to bring about a conflict between the church and the state, and thus to weaken common efforts in the struggle for communism.

It is not a ban on belief in God, nor violence to views and feelings of a religious man but a patient attitude to sincere convictions in matters of faith, making the believer change his mind on the basis of scientific knowledge for his own good, in the name of spiritual emancipation, that is the immutable principle of the Soviet state policy toward religion and the major principle of atheist propaganda by scientific means.

Lenin pointed out that the masses should be provided with different materials on atheist propaganda. He argued that the Communists should do what they can in their scientific-educational work to make the masses "familiar with facts from the most diverse spheres of life, they should be approached in every possible way, so as to interest them, rouse them from their religious torpor, stir them from the most varied angles and by the most varied methods, and so forth."<sup>1</sup>

Consistently following these directives the CPSU concentrates its efforts to combat religious prejudices on regular atheist propaganda to be conducted on a scientific basis and on explanation of the untenability of religious beliefs.

Atheist propaganda, of course, helps to persuade believers away from religion but its power is not limitless. Many other factors—the Soviet way of life, first of all—affect the mass consciousness.

Freedom of conscience, pursued rigorously in the USSR, is an important manifestation of personal freedom in general and

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "On the Significance of Militant Materialism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 230.

is an integral part of the Soviet way of life based on mutual respect, fraternal unity and cooperation of the working people, regardless of their nationality and religious convictions. Freedom of conscience in the USSR is a major instrument ensuring that citizens develop spiritually and fully release their creative forces and abilities.

The CPSU helps people to overcome an ideology incompatible with science, their belief in life beyond the grave and in gods. The Party Programme sets forth a clear-cut goal, understandable for every Soviet citizen, of building communist society, of a struggle for happy life on earth. The practicability of the Party plans and the great achievements in Soviet economic, public and spiritual life, lead the Soviet people to atheism inexorably and inevitably.

Co-workers play a very important part in atheist education of people where they work. Their collective opinion is atheist, and the reactionary and anti-scientific meanings of religious ideology and morals are exposed there patiently and tactfully, but also persistently and reasonably. Public opinion is becoming an increasingly effective force in political and moral education at the present stage of communist construction.

Much is done regularly at places of residence to educate pensioners, disabled workers, war invalids and housewives in the atheistic spirit. It is this group of population that makes up a great part of the believers. The public tries to involve them in social work, to help them maintain contacts with work collectives. They are offered lectures and talks on the subjects they are interested in.

Children and teenagers are an object of special attention and concern. Whenever atheistic work with youth grows slack, churchmen and sectarians try to use the situation to their advantage. Preaching to religious parents, they urge them to bring up their children in a religious spirit. The churchmen, sectarians especially, often try to get in touch with minors and to win them round to the church by means of personal conversations.

School is initially important for education of the young in atheistic spirit. Soviet schools provide children with scientific knowledge. The contents of any subject, therefore, provides ample opportunities for the teacher to demonstrate the power of science

and the untenability of religion to the pupils. Teachers of many schools possessing broad knowledge do successful work to tactfully win round religious parents.

Various forms and methods are used in work with the believers. Personal contacts are the most effective. They help best of all because the direct relationship with a believer makes it possible to understand his interests and why he is religious. The propagandist wins the confidence of the believer, and arouses his interest in conversation not only on atheistic but on other vital subjects, as well.

Cultural-educational institutions do a lot in this respect. Palaces of Culture, clubs, museums, libraries, recreation and reading rooms at factories and election agitation centres arrange regularly for topical meetings, conferences to discuss atheistic and scientific subjects, series of lectures accompanied by films, oral magazines, literary and reader's conferences, question-and-answer evenings. Young people's atheist clubs have been set up under the auspices of cultural-educational institutions. Explanatory work is carried on with believers, as well as with children and teenagers from religious families.

Cinema is an important means of atheistic education. In the early years of Soviet rule, Lenin recommended using films on atheism and the natural sciences to expose the anti-scientific nature of religion.

All atheistic education, whatever its form, is directed firstly against superstitions and religious survivals and includes education of Soviet people in the spirit of communist humanism and friendship between all the peoples of the USSR, in the spirit of Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalism.

While taking care to shape a scientific world-outlook in the minds of all Soviet people and educating people in communist morality, the Party organisations also propagate new festivals, traditions and customs.

The process of forming new traditions and ceremonies began after the socialist way of life had been firmly established. And while the exploitative classes used the ceremonial aspect to maintain and strengthen religiosity and superstitions in the past, ceremonies and new traditions in socialist society contribute to the moulding of high morals in individuals and are effective

means for the atheistic education of the masses. And religious prejudices are overcome faster where the state and public organisations act creatively and introduce new secular ceremonies more actively. For example, the number of religious rituals performed in Leningrad is diminishing every year. Many young people married in church there not so many years ago. The city authorities have devised a new and exciting ceremony for civil marriage and built a wonderful palace for the purpose. The number of marriages in church has been reduced almost to naught as a result. Only 0.24 per cent of the Leningrad newly-weds sanctified their marriages in church in the last few years.

There are fewer baptisms today, too. Propaganda and introduction of new non-religious ceremonies help in no small degree. A lot has been done in this respect in the Ukraine. The Republic's cities and villages now have about 8,000 special premises designed for registration of marriages and the newly-born. Four hundred and fifty-four service centres and 27 banquet rooms have been opened for people to celebrate their anniversaries and family occasions.

Along with other forms of ideological impact, the introduction of new Soviet ceremonies helps people to give up church rituals and leave religion. The establishment of fine rituals, reflecting new content of life, for solemn registration of the newly-born, for silver and golden weddings, for weddings celebrated according to Komsomol traditions has led to a great decline in church ceremonies being performed.

The new traditions have an enormous educational power. "While supporting the progressive traditions of each people, and making them the property of all Soviet people, the Party will in all ways further new revolutionary traditions of the builders of communism..."<sup>1</sup>, says the CPSU Programme.

Proceeding from the demands of the Programme, the Party organisations do much and in varied forms to propagate and introduce new Soviet customs, festivals and rituals. Solemn ceremonies are held in many regions of the Russian Federation, in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Georgia, the Uzbek, Latvian and Estonian Soviet Socialist Republics to celebrate important events in one's personal and public life. They mark the days when a

<sup>1</sup> *The Road to Communism*, p. 562.

child enters school, joins the Young Pioneers and the Young Communist League (Komsomol), when a teenager receives his passport, goes to work, is called up to service in the Soviet Army, etc. These festivals and solemn ceremonies reflect historical revolutionary events, the deeds of Soviet people during the War and in peace.

The Party, state and public organisations in the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic have been searching for new non-religious ceremonies for many years. Voluntary councils for civil ceremonies have been set up all over the Republic. Its Council of Ministers approved Model Rules for a district council on civil ceremonies in 1971. The district council on civil ceremonies is now a legal entity and is self-supporting financially. Colourful, emotionally exciting new civil ceremonies gradually replace religious rituals. Only about 10 per cent of the newly-born are baptised today in the Republic and most of the dead are buried with civil ceremonies.

Bokhara Region does much in the quest for and creative use of revolutionary and labour traditions. Such new festivals and civil ceremonies as *Khasil Bairami* (celebration of the harvest), celebration of corn-shoots, and celebration of the first cotton ball become well-established in many towns and villages, as did celebrations to mark the occasions when the title of communist-way workers is awarded, passports are given to young people, old workers retire and young men are called up for military service. Weddings are celebrated gaily by Komsomol comrades of the newly-weds and special solemn ceremonies accompany registration of marriages. Fifty-eight Wedding Houses have been set up and are operating in the region. In addition to registration of marriages and the newly-born, they are used for giving passports to young people, Honorary Diplomas and awards to the best workers—all in a festive atmosphere with the participation of deputies to local Soviets and representatives of Party, government or Komsomol organisations. The most important events in the life of workers, collective farmers and intellectuals are also celebrated there.

New ceremonies and traditions have been created in their own fashion in the village of Lugumbek, Izbaskan District, Andizhan Region. Due to efforts by all the villagers, actively sup-

ported by their collective-farm chairman, Sharafutdin Saifutdinov, a wonderful park has been laid out in this hot, dry climate. The park became a sort of cultural and recreational centre for the cotton-growers. There is a stadium with a football pitch and a running track adjacent to the park. An artificial swimming pool with a sandy beach is nearby. The central avenue of the park is decorated with sculptures of the veteran workers and veterans of the Revolution, among them the sculpture of Oman-bibi Khuzhamberdieva, a brave Uzbek woman who was the first in the village to throw away her yashmak. It was a brave deed for that time. The enemies of the new life, instigated by religious fanatics, killed Khuzhamberdieva on the same day when she had been elected chairman of the local village Soviet. Her life is an example of ideological fortitude and moral strength for young people today.

Three hundred fir-trees have been planted in the park to mark the number of villagers who died on the battlefields during the Great Patriotic War. The park is like an out-of-door House of Culture. Children are admitted there into Young Pioneers, young people are given their passports, parties are held to see off the youths called up for military service, the young are initiated into the cotton-growers' fraternity and the anniversaries of the senior citizens are celebrated. An Atheists' Club with a small planetarium is being built in the park. All this makes a great impact on the villagers and helps them overcome the vestiges of the past.

The ability to carry on patient explanatory work with the believers is of utmost importance for an atheist in combating religious prejudices still alive in the minds of some Soviet people. Thus training and retraining of lecturers and propagandists of scientific atheism are called for. Much is being done in this respect by Party organisations of Moscow, Leningrad, Gorky, Novosibirsk, the Ukraine, Moldavia and Lithuania. Permanent study groups for atheist lecturers and atheistic faculties in the People's Universities became widespread.

Over 32,000 People's Universities have been set up by now under the auspices of factories, collective and state farms, cultural institutions, higher educational establishments and research institutes. Many have faculties or departments of scientific atheism.

The People's Universities set up to popularise scientific knowledge in many fields help widen the vision of urban and rural dwellers and educate them ideologically and politically. The People's Universities of Atheist Knowledge give invaluable help in shaping the materialist world-outlook. The RSFSR has universities of this type in 50 regions and Autonomous republics. They encompass 53,000 students.

The curricula of the universities include studies of the reasons for religiosity and of the ways of overcoming it in connection with the modern advance in science and technology and achievements of natural sciences.

To impart practical propaganda skills to their students, many universities include practical seminars in their curricula and help them prepare papers on atheistic subjects. A university in Kirovsk, Leningrad Region, for example, holds conferences on the theoretical and practical problems of providing atheistic education for the young. The process of learning is rounded off by lectures and reports prepared by students themselves, which are previously auditioned at seminars.

The students of the People's Universities acquire skills for conducting atheistic meetings, directing study groups of young atheists at schools, and taking practical measures to introduce new Soviet ceremonies and rituals.

The training of experts in scientific atheism remains an important task. The Institute of Scientific Atheism gives close attention to this work. In conjunction with the USSR Ministry of Higher Education, the All-Union *Znaniye* Society and Moscow University, the Institute of Scientific Atheism held conferences between 1975 and 1978 on theoretical and practical subjects for professors teaching scientific atheism at higher educational establishments, as well as for lecturers and propagandists lecturing to popular audiences on atheist subjects. Such conferences and seminars were arranged in Moscow, Alma-Ata, Leningrad, Barnaul, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Vilnius, Volgograd, Cheboksary, the Krasnoyarsk Territory and in some other places. The leading experts in the field of scientific atheism delivered lectures and reports at these seminars. Great attention was devoted to improving the techniques and effectiveness of atheistic propaganda.

Much work is carried on in the USSR to explain the humane principles of Soviet legislation on religious worship. Party committees and executive committees of village, community, district and city Soviets in Gorky Region do this in many forms. Talks, lectures and reports are delivered at places of work and residence in many localities on Soviet legislation and on citizens' rights and obligations.

Purposeful, regular propaganda and strict observance of Soviet legislation on religious worship are the best guarantees for genuine freedom of conscience to be carried out in practice.

*Criticism of the Bourgeois Ideologists Trying to Use  
Religion for the Purpose of Anti-Communism*

Atheist propaganda must take into account attempts by anti-communist organisations to use certain church organisations in the socialist countries as a basis for creating opposition on religious grounds. Bourgeois propaganda tries its hardest to rouse the anti-social activities of such sects as Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostal Zionists, Adventist Reformists and adherents of the Council of the Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists. They make extensive use of radio broadcastings, the press, television, and tourist travel to the USSR and other socialist countries by foreign visitors who specialise in falsifying the position of religion and the church there. In August 1970, for example, one such visitor, Olaf Oldenburg, was expelled from the USSR. He tried to use his stay in this country as a tourist to collect biased information about the position of religion and the church in the USSR. On the very first day of his arrival in Tashkent he found himself in the company of religious extremists who grossly violated Soviet legislation on worship.

Anti-Soviet magazines and newspapers published in the USA, West Germany, Sweden and Great Britain (like the notorious emigrant Black-Hundreds publications *Posev*, *Poslanets pravdy*, *Missiya Khrista v Kommunisticheskoy mire* and so on) produce streams of lies that in the USSR freedom of conscience is allegedly suppressed, churches have been closed down, public prayer buildings are being destroyed according to plan and the believers and clergymen are persecuted. One example is the fabrications of Sven Svensson, an editor of *Vecko-Posten*, a Swedish



newspaper, who used to be a frequent guest of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists. While travelling in the USSR, Svensson admired economic and cultural achievements. Wherever he was, he could attend prayer-meetings of Evangelical Christian Baptists and participate in worship together with them. After he returned to Sweden, however, Svensson published a series of articles grossly distorting Soviet reality. He alleged that a plan is being carried out in the USSR "for combating God ... and to proclaim oneself a Christian in a country under the communist regime means ... to place oneself outside the system".

Forgeries purporting to describe the condition of Islam in the USSR were spread widely in Asian and African countries some years ago. Taking no chances, the anti-Soviet authors preferred not to reveal their own names and presented the forgeries as brochures supposedly written by Soviet diplomats coming from Central Asian Soviet republics. With the purpose of weakening the interest of the Oriental working people in the life of the Soviet land, the authors of these essays grossly distorted the position of Moslems in the USSR and the policies of the Soviet state toward religion and the church. The provocative designs of the anti-Soviet writers were exposed by convincing materials published in the Soviet and foreign press and by statements of the leaders of the Moslem Religious Boards in the USSR. Typical in this respect was a statement made by Mufti Shakir Khiyaletdinov, a religious preacher famous in the Moslem world, who had long been a zealous servant of Islam. He had written the statement not long before his death and it was found by relatives after his demise. The statement said: "In case of a sudden death please execute my following will: I have lived for 53 years under Soviet power. Allah knows, I have never experienced any humiliations or insults from the Soviets all this time. ... Moslems live in complete equality in the Land of Soviets. ..." Addressing the believers, the Mufti wrote: "Live respecting the laws of your state, praising its activities and good will, work honestly for the benefit of society."

Foreign anti-Soviet centres make use of a huge propaganda machinery to spread their slanderous fabrications and to falsify the policies of the Communist Party and the Soviet state in

religious relations, they deliberately conceal many testimonies to the contrary by foreign theologians who repeatedly visited the USSR at the invitation of religious centres and individual believers. The legend about closures of places of worship by administrative orders is the most common "argument" used by the enemies of socialism to prove the alleged persecution of the church. Such claims are clearly ridiculous. The practices of Soviet authorities refute the anti-Soviet inventions. The shrinking network of churches and the resultant closures of places of worship is an inevitable historical process caused by the progress of socialist and communist construction in the USSR. An obvious reason: the people never stopped giving up religion *en masse* and this led to a decrease in the number of parishioners and hence to closures of places of worship. But nevertheless the USSR still has 20,000 churches, mosques, synagogues and prayer-houses for various denominations functioning without hindrance. Moscow alone has 47 active Orthodox churches, a Catholic church, a mosque, three churches of Old Believers, two synagogues and a prayer-house for Evangelical Christian Baptists. And while the number of believers is decreasing every year, this figure has remained the same for many years.

The anti-Communists often viciously attack and grossly falsify the activities of the Orthodox and Catholic, Moslem, Judaic and sectarian religious associations. They do not care that the believers themselves and the most reputable representatives of the religious centres functioning in the USSR repeatedly made statements in the Soviet and foreign press exposing unscrupulous devices of the anti-Soviet writers. "The religious associations in the USSR," said Metropolitan Aleksii of the Moscow Patriarchate, "have everything necessary for carrying out their missions freely, in accordance with the church tradition. The Russian Orthodox Church has 76 dioceses headed by Metropolitans, Archbishops and Bishops. Some dioceses include up to one thousand places of worship. Divine service is celebrated daily in the morning and in the evening in most of the city churches. Their doors are open for each and every believer who can satisfy his or her religious needs." Metropolitan Aleksii went on to say that the church had three theological seminaries and two academies to train priests. 1,200 young people and ordained priests are in-

structed annually in the theological schools of the Orthodox Church. During the post-war years alone, more than 1,000 men have been awarded the degrees of candidates, masters or doctors of theology by the theological academies. The Russian Orthodox Church publishes a journal, *Theological Studies* are issued, prayer-books and calendars are printed. As guaranteed by freedom of conscience set out in the USSR Constitution, three editions of the Bible, two editions of the New Testament and three editions of the Koran have been published over the last few years alone on the order of religious centres. A regular edition of the Catholic prayer-book was published in 1977 in Vilnius.

The Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church convened in 1971 declared that the church in the USSR lives a life of its own quite freely and fully carries out its "spiritual mission in favourable conditions". It was said at the Council sessions that the Soviet Constitution "guarantees complete and equal freedom of conscience for all the citizens of our great Motherland regardless of sex, colour and nationality" and that believers live their "church life in the fullness of beneficial gifts, in the freedom of conscience assured by the Soviet state laws". Mufti Ziyaaddin Khan Ibn Ishan Babakhan, Vazgen I, the head of the Armenian Church, heads of Catholic dioceses and other churchmen have made similar statements many times.

The real condition of religion in the USSR, the policy of the Communist Party and the Soviet state toward religion repudiate fabrications of the bourgeois falsifiers. Nevertheless, reactionary circles abroad try to mislead the public, grossly distorting Soviet policy toward religion and believers. But there are people in the capitalist countries who condemn this slander. Many religious delegations, when they visit the USSR, see for themselves that freedom of conscience here has not been simply declared but is strictly guarded by the state as a constitutional right.

A Moslem delegation from Egypt, headed by Dr. M. M. Faham, the Rector of al-Azhar University, visited the USSR in 1970. When he returned home, Dr. Faham said in an interview to a reporter from the Cairo weekly *Roz el-Youssef*: "Religious freedom in the USSR is the truth, I saw it with my own eyes, I felt it myself. . . . The mosques, cathedrals and other religious institutions and holy places are everywhere in the Soviet Union.

Moslems, Christians and Judaists may perform their religious duties in all parts."

In their attempts to compromise the humane principles of CPSU policies toward Oriental nations oppressed by imperialism, bourgeois reactionary propaganda again tries to revive the hackneyed myth about restriction of Moslems' rights in the USSR. It became especially active in view of the revolutionary events in Afghanistan. Making good use of lies and deception, bourgeois propaganda in conjunction with internal counter-revolutionaries claims that Moslems are allegedly persecuted in the USSR for their faith and are not allowed to celebrate their rites. Reactionary circles try to use such devices in order to make the Afghan population distrust the Soviet Union and to frighten them with the prospect of closure of their mosques and eradication of their religion. But the barefaced lie of the enemies of the revolution backfired. Having overthrown an oppressive and hated regime, the April Revolution in Afghanistan left national customs and beliefs intact and the country's popular government stated unequivocally that believers' rights to freedom of worship are guaranteed and it is rigorously putting these guarantees into effect.

The convincing facts proved to be stronger than lies about alleged persecution of Moslems in the Soviet Union itself. A representative delegation of the Moslem clergy from Afghanistan visited the USSR early in 1980 at the invitation of the Moslem Religious Board for Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The delegation became acquainted with the life of Moslems in Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenia and Kirghizia. Prominent Moslem figures of Afghanistan attended public prayers at ancient mosques in Tashkent, Bokhara, Samarkand and Baku; they studied the activities of the Madrasa and the Higher Islamic Academy. The Afghan clergy was much impressed by the care taken by the Soviet state to preserve monuments of Moslem culture, by the friendly relations between people and by the respectful attitude to national customs and faith. Just as the believers of other denominations, Moslems celebrate their rites unimpeded. The third edition of the Koran has been published recently by the Board, as have other theological books to interpret the Koran. The journal *Muslims of the Soviet East* has a circulation of

thousands. These striking and convincing facts in themselves were a good repudiation of the lies spread by the slanderers.

Ronald Goulding, the Secretary of the European Baptist Alliance, has spoken repeatedly about the great freedom of worship existing in the USSR compared with many capitalist countries. Kaare Lauveng, General Secretary of the Norwegian Baptist Church, has also made this observation.

M. Nigri, Vice-President of the General Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventists visited the USSR in 1976. After he had seen the life of Adventist communities, M. Nigri met reporters from Radio Latvia and the newspaper *Golos Rodiny*, who asked him to describe his impressions of the way Seventh-Day Adventists live in the Soviet Union. M. Nigri condemned the inventions spread in the bourgeois countries about alleged persecution of the believers in the USSR. Said he: "Real freedom is to live in agreement with the law. . . . Alas, many people, including Christians, substitute the correct understanding of freedom with speculations about the right to do what they like. For that matter, people in the socialist countries are more inclined and interested in living rightly than in doing wrong things."

The President of the General Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventists, Robert H. Pierson, visited the USSR in August 1978 with his wife. When he returned home to the USA, R. Pierson published a series of articles in the *Adventist Review* to describe his impressions of this trip. In contrast to the fables spread in the West about persecution of Adventists, Pierson told his people that in the USSR "Seventh-Day Adventists have been permitted to worship in their sanctuaries. . . . Practically every Seventh-Day Adventist church has a choir, and many have instrumental groups." Pierson was clearly satisfied to write that "we were able to visit the various centers we desired to visit, we were free to speak to large congregations of our people and to meet with our workers in all the centers we visited." "I confess to preaching the longest sermon in my ministry in Moscow," he added.

In their struggle for democracy and social progress, against the intrigues of the present-day reactionaries, the Communist Parties act jointly with other patriotic forces that include the progressive clergy. Communists support those clergymen who

participate in the fight for peace and detente, against the designs of the reactionary circles to unleash a new world war. "Communists are convinced that in this way—through broad contacts and joint action—the mass of religious people can become an active force in the anti-imperialist struggle and in carrying out far-reaching social changes," says the Final Document of the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, held in Moscow in 1969.

The correctness of these propositions and of the far-sightedness of the Communist Parties' policy can be proved by the World Conference "Religious Workers for Lasting Peace, Disarmament and Just Relations Among Nations" held in Moscow in June 1977. The Conference was sponsored by the heads of the churches functioning in the USSR, who had issued an appeal to which religious figures had responded all over the world. Over 700 influential religious figures from more than 100 countries arrived in Moscow to take part in the Conference. Many delegations were led by heads of Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, Judaic, Shintoist and other denominations, ministers and deputy ministers for religions, members of Parliaments, prominent theologians, owners and publishers of major clerical newspapers and journals. The Conference was attended by delegates and observers from the World Council of Churches, World Muslim League, the Holy See (Vatican), Christian Peace Conference, Baptist World Alliance, Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace, All-Africa Conference of Churches, Conference of European Churches and from other religious organisations both regional and world-wide.

More than 300 delegates participated in the discussions that had taken place in the Working Groups "For Lasting Peace", "For Disarmament" and "For Just Relations among Nations". They sharply criticised US imperialism which leads working people into a deep economic crisis, unemployment and misery and which is unable to solve social problems fairly. The participants in the Conference unanimously spoke in favour of the strengthening of peace, detente and an end of the arms race, and condemned the fascist and racist regimes in Latin America and South Africa, racial discrimination, neo-colonialism and aggression of Israeli Zionism. Many speakers cited the Soviet Union's peace-loving

policy, its role in preventing a new world war and its aid to the national liberation movement as an example to follow. They pointed to the advantages of socialism over capitalism and denounced exploitation in the countries dominated by capital. The Rev. Stanislaus Tissa Balasuriya, a priest from Sri Lanka, said that what the speakers should have in mind was the establishment of socialism on a world or international scale, and also a just distribution of the fruits of labour. Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios (India) said that socialism meant humanism and a harmonious development of the individual, and not just consumption. Socialism offered various ways of overcoming human problems.

The Conference unanimously adopted two Final Documents: "Appeal to the Governments of All Countries of the World" and "Appeal of the Conference Participants to Religious Leaders and Believers of All Religions Throughout the World", which called for consolidation and expansion of the detente policies, an end to the arms race, and the realisation of total disarmament.

Summing up the results of the Conference Pimen, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, said: "We are very pleased that this important event took place in Moscow, our capital city, in an atmosphere of peace that is natural for the many different peoples of the USSR, for its social system and its state policies, an atmosphere to which we are accustomed in the day-to-day life of the Russian Orthodox Church and that of the other Churches and religious associations in the country."

The delegates toured the country after the Conference, saw Soviet life, attended divine services and met with believers of various denominations. Many of them told Soviet and foreign journalists in interviews and at press conferences of their impressions of the Conference and of the position of religion and the believers in the USSR. "This is the first time I've been in the USSR," said Prof. Abdeljelil al-Temimi, a Moslem leader from Tunisia, "and before I've come here I had a wrong impression of the position of churches in the Soviet Union, formed by the Western press. I visited many churches here and spoke with clergymen and believers. I found that citizens of the USSR can freely profess any faith and they have no obstacles put in their way." The Rev. Herbert Mochalski from West Germany thus answered

some questions from reporters: "I've been to the Soviet Union many times over the last 25 years. I testify: the Soviet Union has proclaimed and implemented a real freedom of conscience. . . . The matter is quite different with us in the West. Many articles of the Constitution exist there only on paper."

There was a frank talk and exchange of opinions at the Conference. "We were especially impressed by the fact that the Conference had taken place in an atheistic country," said Gerhard Claas, then Vice-President of the Baptist World Alliance. Then he added that "there will be enemies in the Western countries, who will accuse the religionists of collaboration with Communists. But we are not ashamed of this collaboration for peace." The Chief of the Worship Department in Bolivia stated: "I, as a religious man, declare that such a conference could not have been organised in any other country and this is a striking proof of freedom of conscience in the USSR."

Bourgeois propaganda intentionally keeps silent about such statements and objective appraisals about religion in the USSR, but at the same time spreads a flood of deliberate lies and slander all over the world.

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There never has been any persecution of religion and the believers in the USSR, nor is there now. Communists firmly oppose violence to freedom of conscience. The policy of the Communist Party toward religion is based on Lenin's directives calling for tact and consideration in dealing with believers and patient and regular work with them. Soviet reality educates people in the spirit of atheism. But conscious atheism cannot be developed mechanically. Brezhnev stressing the enormous importance of education of the Soviet people in the spirit of communist awareness and scientific-materialist convictions said: "We are thus faced with enormous important work and it will probably take quite a long time because human psychology is remade much more slowly than the material foundations of life.

"The Party is conducting this work on an increasingly broad front and will continue to do so. In this sphere practically everything is important—the right atmosphere in family life, compe-



tent organisation of the educational process, a healthy atmosphere at the place of work, efficient everyday services, and much else."<sup>1</sup>

At all stages in its glorious history, the CPSU deemed it inadmissible to contrast believers to atheists and set a task for propagandists of atheism to involve believers in construction of the new life through ideological influence.

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<sup>1</sup> L. I. Brezhnev, *Following Lenin's Course. Speeches and Articles (1972-1975)*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p. 110.

### REQUEST TO READERS

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design, and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

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*Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*